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OR,

THE DARK AGES.

A NOVEL.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE WABASH", "MODERN SOCIETY IN ROME",
ETC.

*"Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,
Le cortesie, l'audaci impresi io canto."*

ARIOSTO.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1857.

[*The Author of this Work reserves the right of Translation.*]

T. RICHARDS, 37 GREAT QUEEN STREET.

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P R E F A C E.

THE events recorded in the following pages happened seven hundred years ago; and I assure the reader that neither I nor any of my family now living took any part in them.

I should have deemed it superfluous to make such a declaration had it not been insisted that I myself and the several members of my household, together with real events that had happened to each of us, had been introduced by me into my recent work entitled *Modern Society in Rome*. Because, in *The Wabash*, I had recorded what happened to us in our wild travels in the Back Woods of America, it was thought that we must play a part in every novel or chronicle that I might publish!

And as I do not make my novels a vehicle for personal histories, so I would request non-readers to believe that I do not use them as channels for controversial or religious disquisitions. I write

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for the general public ; and am neither a divine, a polemic, nor a missionary.

I should have deemed it superfluous to make this declaration also, had not one or two of my reviewers, who had evidently not read that Roman novel (and heaven save reviewers if they were obliged to read all they notice!) had not one or two of my reviewers totally misapprehended the whole story, and, judging doubtless from precedent or analogy, reported that it was entirely animated by religious or sectarian feelings and disquisitions. That such was not the character of the book, is shown by the reception it met with from the three Catholic periodicals to which the publishers sent copies as a matter of course :—the editor of one of these reviewed it in what he thought a *safe* manner, and was told, by what he considered the highest authority, on such matters, in England, that, if he was unwilling to condemn the work, he ought not to have noticed it at all: the editor of the second declared that he *would* not write against it, and *dared* not write in its favour: whilst, for the third publication, an approving notice was prepared, at the request of the editor, but was rejected by the ecclesiastical censorship to which the writer chose to submit his paper!!

This last-mentioned gentleman is no politician,

but ranks, amongst his co-religionists, as one of the first theologians in England. His approval of the work showed that it contained nothing which these parties could object to on theological grounds; whilst its condemnation by the others proved that its scope was not the furtherance of their own or any other religious views; but that they were scandalized by the liberality and freedom and independence of my remarks on the temporal administration of Rome. I knew Pius the Ninth himself to have Italian and liberal aspirations, and I did not spare counsellors and a system which he himself had not energy to discard. I am told that I should have been pardoned if I had condemned the Pontiff and spared the system.

It may well be believed that it is unpleasant to me to enter into these explanations. I am compelled to do so because it has been reported (however erroneously) that my novel has been placed in the Index of Books forbidden at Rome! No question of faith was involved in the matter of those volumes; for, as I was not called upon to advance any, so did I not compromise any:—though I have my own religious convictions, I do not feel myself called upon in these books to propose them, nor to shock those of others:—but questions of political government, questions af-

fecting the material well-being of Italy were involved; and because I wrote frankly on these subjects, I am denounced by English Catholic writers, who would deny to themselves the liberty of thought, speech and action which is exercised by their co-religionists all over the world. It may be gall and wormwood to these gentlemen: but if they exclude all liberal-minded Catholic politicians in Europe and America from fellowship, they will leave themselves, I am happy to say, in a very, very small minority indeed!

I trust to the honourable conduct of the general press of England to protect me from the misrepresentation of bigots and sycophants. Catholics are constantly told, "If you disapprove the illiberal, violent, ultramontane conduct which we attribute to your co-religionists in this country, why do you not proclaim that you are animated by a different spirit?" Let those who call for such avowals, recognize and uphold the public men and the writers who make them.

But as the divines of whom I have spoken condemned my Roman novel because it was as liberal as Pio Nono himself had been in the first years of his reign, so many other critics objected to it because, instead of the republican principles of Mazzini (which every day shows to be more and more repudiated by Italians), it

advocated a constitutional government of the Roman States, under the Popes, with the secularisation of the government offices. The plan was too moderate, the example of Sardinia (which I instanced as proving that a constitutional government was possible in Italy) was too convincing for my views not to be denounced by revolutionary and republican refugees in England. Many of these write English fluently: and not all my invectives against Austrian rule and Austrian intervention in Italy,—not all my objurgations against the mean tyranny of King Bomba,—could win me favour in their eyes while I repudiated the Mazzinian dream. From one, who did not favour me with his name, I received fourteen foolscap pages, in manuscript, of minutely-critical abuse! It was gratifying to me that an anonymous clever man should have thought the book of an author, to whom he said that he also was unknown, worth so much of his time.

It was also gratifying to me that this writer, and, indeed, almost every other reviewer, recognized the truth of all my statements as to the domestic history of the times. I admit that I did not give my authority for everything that I promulgated as an historian: but I put my name to the work, and I so vouched for the truth of

every historic statement which I advanced. Describing events of the truth of which I had gained evidence on the spot, I saw not wherefore my testimony should not be as sufficient as that of any other contemporary writer. I admit also that the fictitious personages whom I have introduced into that story are mere pegs on which to hang anecdotes and incidents of the times: but the line which separates the fictitious and the imaginary from the real and the historic characters and portions of my drama, is quite sufficiently evident to whomsoever cares to mark it.

It is not questioned that the historical novel and drama is an excellent mode of familiarizing the mind with the domestic details of history: Shakespeare, Disraeli, Bulwer, Walter Scott, and a host of imitators, have established this beyond dispute. But it is questioned whether contemporary history can be properly introduced into a novel; and I am told that the epoch I have chosen to illustrate is all too recent. Do we not, I ask, do we not find the greatest charm of classical writers to consist in the more minute delineation of the domestic manners of their own times which they occasionally give us? Whenever they lift the curtain and let us glance into the interior of their domestic life, do we not eagerly peep under it? What would be the

charm of Tacitus without his withering hits at familiar rascaldom? Some centuries hence, will the political novels of Disraeli be less valued because statesmen of contemporary history are introduced and play familiar parts in them?

But enough: let me only thank the general public, and the great majority of the reviewers to whom I have alluded in this preface, for the favourable reception they have given the volumes in question. This argument in approval of contemporaneous history, is one that it were unwise to follow further while I am introducing a work the events recorded in which happened in "The Dark Ages". Why I have given it such a title, I scarcely know; unless it were that when lately reading again Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, which he calls "A Gothic Story", it occurred to me to challenge—not his inimitable style of composition—but the truthfulness of his description of the manners of the same Cimmerian period through which I myself was then disporting by the sure light of contemporary chronicles.

For I would be permitted to add that every personage introduced into this story—excepting the Saracen and the couple who are made happy at the end, and who were necessary as types of a class then common in Sicily and Italy—that every other personage had a historical existence

and really played that part which I have attributed to him or her. I am aware that events and incidents are so multiplied as to have sufficed for a score of novels. This may be a defect : but they all really occurred thus closely one upon the other ; and I could not omit any in justice to the period I had undertaken to illustrate.

Botleigh Grange,
Candlemas Day, 1857.

THE DARK AGES.

CHAPTER I.

“To be or not to be:—that is the question.”

Hamlet.

It was a curious old pile, that castle of Beni-zekher, or, as the Sicilians have since called it by a very easy transition, San Benedetto! Straight walls of hewn stone, diversified by little Moorish arches and graceful cupolas, were flanked by two octangular towers, of rougher masonry, added on the outside of the southern wall, and by a large square Norman keep on the north, rising to the height of twenty feet or more above the rest of the building. The appearance of the whole pile showed, at once,

that it was a Saracen dwelling house, converted into a fortified castle by its more recent owners from the North.

It was in a room in one of the smaller octangular towers, a room of the shape of the outer walls, but reduced in size as much as was necessary for steps to wind in the thickness of the wall to the battlemented roof above—it was in such a room that conversed those who attract our notice and bespeak our interest. A sweet female voice, in light and joyous tones, has, for some while, reached our ear; and its merry prattle has seemed to rise still more gaily after it had momentarily yielded to the expostulating tones of deeper and more mellow accents. Joyous, indeed, was the look of that sweet female speaker: nor was the character of the physiognomy of the knight, who addressed her, so grave and thoughtful as the tones of his voice would have led a listener to suppose. They were both perfect specimens of male and female

beauty. Let us not be told that every writer of romance so portrays his hero and his heroine; when a stroke of the pen can bestow attractions, he must, indeed, be a niggard scribe who would withhold them. Our personages are not, however, of our own imagining. Seven centuries have passed since either smiled on the other:

“The Knight’s bones are dust,
And his good sword rust—
His soul is with the saints we trust.”

But we must not forestall our story: though, as we have owned that the parties lived nearly seven centuries ago, the reader will naturally imagine that they are not living now.

At the time, then, of which we write, and on that particular day when they conversed in the little octagon room, the lady’s fair face was lighted up by a smile which showed more soul and expression than one would have thought features so fair could ever have conveyed. Her hair, indeed,

was almost as white as flax; her eyes were of the blue of those southern skies; her skin was so transparently white that no one would have supposed she could have been exposed for twenty years to the wear and tear of the world. Her figure was slight; her step active: her dress was indescribable. We do not mean to say that we are incompetent to describe it; we have it all there before our mind's eye—her little bejewelled Saracenic jackets—her flowing Grecian robes—her Norman untrowsered modesty. But when the dress of so many nations was combined in the attire of one female, it may well be supposed that fashion ruled not with immutable sway; that the fancy of the wearer was the only guide constantly followed; and, consequently, that were we to give up a whole chapter to detail the outward attire of our heroine, we should not be enriching the heads of antiquaries by details of forgotten lore, but should only be describing one

fanciful woman's fancy of the day. All will admit that this were loss of good room.

Nor can we give much space to describe the appearance of the person whose deep-toned voice we had heard so finely contrasted with the musical treble of the lady. And yet he had a noble presence! A clear olive skin mantled over a set of the finest features ever moulded out of earth, and perfected in five-and-twenty years. Large black eyes seemed to shoot forth the fire of a resolute and undaunted soul. And yet the long dark eye-lashes which added so much to his beauty, seemed to soften an expression which might otherwise have become fixed and stern. You thought it was the eye-lashes which did this; but as you watched that speaking face, you saw an unsteadiness in the glance itself, and a slight vibration about the well-formed lips and the corners of the mouth, which showed that, in truth, the owner's character was

not, perhaps, so firm and resolute as the first fire of those black eyes would have led you to believe. A something unsettled—a something wavering seemed to lurk behind, and to be striven against by the conscious mind. But then, how well trimmed was his beard, and what noble locks he wore flowing all around his neck, and lying, like coiled and glistening snakes, upon his satin hood!

This hood was now thrown back, so as to show his head to the best advantage, and was joined to a hauberk or outer tunic, which bedecked limbs of perfect symmetry, but of dimensions above the common mould. It was formed of primrose-coloured satin, too slightly wadded, indeed, to resist even a sword-cut, but this insufficiency was guarded against by polished rings of gold and silver, fixed, in alternate rows, upon the dress; and, although about two inches in diameter, lapping lightly over one another so accurately as to form a sort of

chain-armour, which no slight thrust could have pierced. Nothing could be richer than this dress: it was open before and behind, that it might not incommode the wearer when on horseback; open also at the sleeves, which did not reach below the elbows: but underneath, a close tunic of pale blue silk fitted tightly to the well-formed limbs, and allowed them to be seen in all their fine proportions. Boots of highly prepared leather lined with blue satin, folded back over the calves of his legs: and in front of each leg was a diamond brooch to which the long pointed toes of the boots were fastened up by a slight chain of gold. When we add that, on his right hip, he wore, suspended through a loop in his hauberk, a long curved scimeter, whose jewelled handle stood up above its golden scabbard, we shall have given the picture of such a young man as no lady's heart could fail to admire in these degenerate days.

Was such, however, the feeling of the lady in that little room? Perhaps the following conversation will enlighten us on the subject.

“Nay, beautiful Countess,” interposed the young man (whose person and dress we beg to say we have described as it is portrayed by contemporary historians), “nay, beautiful Countess,” he expostulated, “can you not, will you not be serious?”

“In very truth, then,” she lightly answered, “I neither can nor will, when I hear you talk of falling on your knees. Don’t, I pray you. I should laugh so much that you would be offended outright.”

“And you would be still better pleased if I were offended outright,” expostulated the knight in a tone half of sorrow and half of anger. “You, who will never allow me to say what you know I wish to express, would be right joyful were I so displeased as to free you from my importunities for ever.”

“*I* know what you wish to express, Don Matteo!” exclaimed the lady. “Why you must think me as great a prophet as padre Giovacchino himself. How is it possible that I can know your sentiments when you do not know them yourself?”

“Is it possible, then, that my devotion for so many years...”

“Many years! discourteous Chevalier; how old, then, would you make me?” gaily interposed the lady.

“Saint Agatha forbid that I should make you responsible for having tortured mankind for one year longer than you can be justly charged withal,” said Don Matteo reproachfully. “But you know that ever since your widowhood—ever since your hand has been free—”

“You have wished to throw yourself at my feet, is it not so—when you have seen me?” she archly asked; “and have been ready to do the same by half a dozen other Sicilian dames when you have seen them.

Oh, Don Matteo, I know your heart and character better than you do yourself. You have so much to be proud of justly, that you would never acknowledge to yourself how unstable you are."

The latter part of this sentence was spoken in more serious tones than any she had yet used, and with an expression of feeling that evidently much moved the young nobleman. His eyes fell beneath her steady look of interest; and he stood silent and irresolute before the beautiful widow—who, though so young, had now, however, been a widow for several years. She watched him keenly and with an increasing look of interest when she saw his glance fall before her own. She allowed time for her words to produce their effect upon his mind; and only when she saw that he was about to speak, did she again break silence.

"And say not," she then added, "that my hand is free. What heiress or what fe-

male holder of any lands is free to dispose of herself or of them as she may please? You know well what a controul that odious Majone keeps over every fief: and my brother, the king, seems to feel and to own our relation as little as the Church and the laws do. By Saint Martin of Tours," she said in a tone of rising anger, "I am less free than the veriest bondswoman that walks through the streets of Palermo!"

"This must, this shall be amended!" ejaculated the knight warmly.

"Nay, do not think I have said it would be any better for you if it were amended, as your valour would doubtless propose," interrupted the lady with forced gaiety. "But now," she added, "leave me, Sir Baron. We have had a long conference to-day: and if the Lord Admiral Majone hears of it, he will be inclined to send me out of harm's way, with my cousin, poor Tancred, and all the other noble prisoners whom he has lodged so snugly under the

palace. Go, then, before he grow suspicious; and success attend you with the lady to whom you are about to carry your constant vows."

"Cruel—cruel Clemence—" began the knight; but she waved her hand in such a style of remonstrance as, at once, cut short his intended protestations; and then held it out to him with an air of more than regal condescension, while a tear rose up and suffused those bright blue eyes. The Baron caught her fair hand; and bending one knee, pressed it with devotion to his lips: then, obedient to a second sign, he hastily turned him away and left the apartment.

In the small court below, the knight found his horse and attendants; and as this visit had been somewhat private for the reasons hinted at by the Countess, he had come with a smaller train than generally followed one so wealthy and so admired for his splendour. Two mounted attendants, besides his squire, were all who

now waited on him. One of the former of these held his lord's charger—a small but spirited animal, showing the strength of bone of the Norman war-horse, united to the symmetry and fire of the Arabian breed. Without saying a word, the nobleman leapt into the high-peaked Asiatic saddle, which rested upon a flowing cloth of silk and gold, and turned his horse through the postern gateway; while he drew the hood over his own head, more for the purpose of sheltering it from the rays of the afternoon sun than as a protection from the balmy air of a Sicilian summer. The squire and attendants followed. The two latter were dressed in the red quilted gambaisons of the period, covered, of course, with the iron shirt of steel rings: on their heads were the low iron skull-caps common to men-at-arms. Straight swords on their thighs, and, at their backs, those bows and a quiver of those arrows for which the Normans had ever been so celebrated, were all their offensive arms.

The squire, however, who closely followed his lord, calls for our more particular notice. He was a young man of fair complexion, who could scarcely have numbered more than twenty-two years; and whose dress and general appearance were somewhat singular, even in a country where so many different nations lived together, and maintained their own several habits. Richard MacMardagh was, by birth, an Irishman: his father had been a follower of the deputation which, a few years before, had vainly waited upon Adrian IV (the Englishman who then filled St. Peter's chair); had vainly waited upon him in the attempt to avert that bull which handed over his country to the gentle mercies of the English monarch. Disappointed in the object of their mission, the father had died in Italy: and the son, friendless and a stranger, had had the good fortune to recommend himself to the noble Baron of Taverna, and to bespeak his goodwill and favour. Being

of gentle birth (gentle enough, at least, to pass muster with the descendant of one of the Norman adventurers who had accompanied the great Count Roger, half a century before, in his first descent upon Sicily) —Richard MacMardagh had been permitted to approach his lord's person in the quality of page. He had soon risen into favour by his trustworthiness, and by his frank and cheerful bearing: and now often attended him as a favoured squire. Still, however, the Irishman could not forget the land of his fathers; and every year, every month that he passed away from it, made his thoughts recur to it more and more often, and dwell upon it more and more fondly.

Thus, though living among those who placed their greatest pride in the splendour of their arms and in their warlike equipments, nothing could induce Richard MacMardagh to forego the prejudices of his own father-land, which taught him to see in all defensive armour only so many proofs

of the cowardice of the wearer. He still adhered to the customs of his own countrymen as much as his patron would permit him to do so: and the latter, who felt the pride of a young man in having followers from different countries, did not require his favourite squire to forego that dress and equipment which marked him out as a stranger from some unknown land. Richard had, also, many arguments by which to prove his wisdom in refusing to be burdened with defensive armour: he had, he said, to bear his knight's helmet or his heavy lance, to carry his shield, and often, when he was on visits of courtesy like the present, to hold the heavy straight warsword or battle-axe with which he would not encumber his own person. How much more conveniently could he do this when clothed only in his tight-fitting national dress of black woollen, with a sling and a supply of bolts suspended under his left arm! Thus would he argue; and although

he had so far deferred to the habits of his adopted country as to have stuck in his belt a handseax, or Anglo-Saxon dagger, to be used as occasion might require in freeing his lord or otherwise defending him should he be unhorsed in battle, he never would forego the machue or pile which, in shape much like the Irish shillelah, he had had forged of steel, and now always carried thrust through his belt in the manner in which the others bore their swords. Some Norman laws (those of our English conqueror for example) had marked these piles or maces as the weapons of serfs, who were not allowed to bear lances and swords, the proper arms of knighthood; but not even this disparagement could induce Richard MacMardagh to forego his accustomed weapon.

Such were those who composed the small cavalaade that now emerged from the castle of Beni-zekher and rode through the wild scenery around it. Wild, indeed, and beau-

tiful were those wooded hills. Shrubs of every variety covered the rocks above, and opened into green glades as they neared the plain around. Tall clumps of dark green stone pine trees towered, here and there, above the copsewood, and contrasted beautifully with its bright foliage. The ground in the open spaces was covered with wild flowers of every variety—wild flowers in that favoured region—but choice green-house plants could they be transported into our northern clime: and this varied carpeting of every hue was broken, here and there, by large patches of purple convolvulus, matted together in luxuriant masses of flower, or climbing up the naked stems of the lofty pine.

The noble knight rode slowly and pensively through this quiet woodland; and thought, over and over again, on the conversation which had just passed between him and the lady he loved. She was, indeed, a beautiful and high-spirited woman:

and he thought how, two generations ago, one of his haughty Norman race would have been fired in the pursuit of her by those very dangers which she had just hinted at. Was he less brave than they had been? or was he enervated by having been born in that slothful clime, and by carrying in his veins the blood of that young and noble Sicilian Greek whom his father had rescued from his ruder fellow-northmen and honourably married? At times, he thought it must be so. At times, he was glad to excuse to himself that want of energy and perseverance which he secretly felt within him, by throwing the blame on circumstances over which he could have had no control. And yet the Countess Clemence was, indeed, a prize worth contending for—so beautiful in herself, so wealthy in the many fiefs which her father, the late king, had heaped upon his favourite, though illegitimate daughter. And why should he, why should he, Ma-

thew of Taverna, fear to strive for the prize? What though the king himself should oppose?—the king was but one of themselves. His father had, indeed, deservedly ruled, for more valiant or wiser monarch never won or swayed a kingdom: but this king, his son, had been long known as the least deserving of his offspring; had only come to the throne by the unexpected death of his four elder brothers:—why should such an one rule over the descendant of those Norman warriors who had chosen their sovereign from among the most worthy, and had only bowed to him as such?

Long the thoughts of the young knight wandered on in this dangerous and tempting vein, while his horse scarcely moved through the shade of those high overhanging boughs. Anon they turned to the High Admiral Majone, the king's favourite—his sole minister. Clemence had alluded to him more strongly even than to the

king. He would, indeed, be a dangerous enemy with whom to contend: powerful—unprincipled—and surrounded by unscrupulous dependents. Should he risk an encounter with such an adversary? Could not fame and power be more securely won by conciliating him? Fame and power:—who panted more eagerly than he did to achieve them? What but his earnest aspirations for fame and power, what but his own secret pride had made him hold himself so much aloof, not only from the High Admiral and the court, but, also, from his brother barons? This must be no longer. Years were passing:—five-and-twenty had already slipped away; and yet he had achieved nothing. Brave spirits were astir all over the world. None excelled him in arms, this he well knew; and he had been told, by those whom he did not deem flatterers, that he possessed that rude eloquence which was most prized amongst his compeers. Such opportunities should no longer

be thrown away. He would do something. He would win Clemence or, at all events, he would win power and fame.

They were now approaching the natural gorge that winds through the summit of the rocks that enclose that quiet valley ; and such thoughts as we have attempted to portray were coursing more and more wildly through the brain of the ambitious Baron, when he was aroused from his reveries by Richard MacMardagh, who rode to his side at the same time that a shrill cry overhead caused him to look up to the top of the rock beside the gorge.

On the very edge of the precipice, stood the figure of a young woman clothed in a plain long robe and flowing white veil. That veil, however, was thrown back and showed features so wan and pale, although so beautifully carved, that the Baron might be well excused for thinking her at first a spirit of the air just alighted on that high rock : her person, though tall, was so slight

and slim, that she wanted only wings to perfect the angelic illusion to the mind of the pious Norman. MacMardagh had not the slightest doubt that he beheld a heavenly vision. The figure, however, allowed no time for their observations and conjectures. Having drawn their attention by her first shrill cry, she gesticulated violently with her slim arms, and made signs, the purport of which could not be mistaken, to urge them to advance speedily. They did so; and passing the gorge, the Baron, who rode first, soon looked down on the other side of the ridge of mountain. He then drew rein for a moment; and signed to his squire to come to his side. Without speaking, he took the shield from him and hung it round his own neck; grasped his long lance and laid it in rest; put spurs to his horse; and, uttering the war-cry of "Harou! Harou! to the rescue!" dashed down the opposite hill.

Some short way down the steep descent,

a party, whom their dress showed to be native Saracens, were attacking a group whom one would have been surprised to see in that lonely place had one not remembered that it was still almost within a walk of the city of Palermo. We said that the Saracens were attacking the group; we ought to have said dispersing them: for two or three men were, even then, flying off from the pagan banditti. These seemed on the point of leading away two females whom they had captured, while their leader stood with a drawn scimitar over a prostrate Sicilian. The cry of the Norman Baron soon, however, drew his attention; and, making one ineffectual blow at his intended victim, he sprang upon his horse and turned bravely to meet the new comer, while he fixed an arrow in the bow he held in hand. The Knight's quickness of eye alone saved him: for the slight hauberk he wore could not have resisted the practised force of the other: he dipped his head, and

the arrow flew harmlessly by. Richard MacMardagh struck it down with his pile as it fluttered past him with spent power ; and brandishing the heavy weapon as though it had been a willow wand, rode boldly up to the side of his lord. The Saracen had been too wary of the strength of the Norman lance to abide its blow : he had rode off to a little distance ; and with his half-dozen followers, was preparing to send a volley of arrows and resist their assailant : but seeing the squire and the two men-at-arms ride up, they discharged them more in bravado than with any serious purpose, and rode off into the forest. Ere he turned his horse's head, the leader came, however, a few steps nearer ; and called out, in the Italian of the country, "Signor Barone, we shall meet again. Tell that screaming white girl that she has foiled Abderachman, but that he never forgives." Shaking his hand towards the mountain, he soon disappeared beneath the boughs of the forest.

Mathew of Taverna immediately addressed himself to appease the fears of the two females, who still sat on their mules where the bandit—for such, having heard his name, they now knew him to be—had left them. The one was a young girl, about fourteen years old, with the complexion and ardent look of a gypsy, but superbly dressed in the richest manufactures of Greece; the other, her companion, was half-a-dozen years older, and, in manner as well as in dress, was much more humble and steady than her young friend or mistress appeared to be.

“Whom has my good angel given me the happiness of assisting?” asked the Baron as he leapt from his horse and courteously approached the younger female.

“One whom thy good angel would have thee make thy wife,” answered in soft and sweetest tones, a voice close behind them. The Knight turned abruptly, and started, as he saw, at his side, the figure in white

whose cry had first drawn him to the rescue.

“Fear not,” said the figure gently, and casting down her dark eyes with a look of angelic purity; “I saw the pagan banditti about to attack these wanderers; and, from the hill, I saw thee also draw nigh. Thou camest in time to save them. But now,” she continued, drawing herself up, while every feature sparkled with the flash of inspiration, “but now save thyself from the dangers thou wouldest court. Beware of joining thyself to Clemence of Catanzaro. This, this is the bride with whom thy days should pass in peace and safety. Aye, look on her. Disregard my words, and vainly, oh vainly those eyes will mourn the remembrance of all God’s heavenly creations!”

While the young man stood mute with astonishment at this singular address, the gentle prophetess, for such she seemed, turned swiftly around, and was on the point of darting again up the rocks from

which she had descended unseen, when the elder female of those just rescued from the Saracens, and who had quietly slipped from her saddle, sprang forward, and, catching hold of the skirts of her long white robe, forcibly detained her; then casting herself on her knees before her, she seized her hand and respectfully kissed it while she bathed it with her tears.

“At last, at last, dear lady Rosalia, I have found you!” she joyfully exclaimed. “Nay, nay you cannot unconvince my devoted heart. Surely, surely you do not forget your friend Theresa! Oh, think of the years when she watched over you, and played with you more as an elder sister than as an attendant; when the lords William and Tancred and all of us lived so happily at Lecce! Oh, how and wherefore did you leave us?”

Thus rapidly the young girl ran on, heedless of all the show of resistance that pale emaciated figure made to check her unwished-for revelations.

“It is vain, then, to hope to conceal it,” she at length said, with a gentle sigh. “The will of God be done. I am, dear Theresa, that poor Rosalia thou speakest of. But ask me not to say more. God has deigned to call me to Himself; and has put me, as I humbly hope, in the way of saving mine own soul. Why should I have stayed in the world? Thou knowest how distasteful it had ever been to me. And when, during a retreat which, unknown to all, I had made to this holy convent,” she said, pointing towards the noble pile of the convent of St. Martin, “when during a pious retreat to its walls, I heard that the new king had imprisoned my brothers, the fear of his anger came to strengthen my religious vows. I dared not return to the palace. Oh, thou knowest not how blessed is a life in these hills, with God and the holy Virgin for sole companions!” she added with a look of enthusiasm. “But follow me not, follow me not,”

she cried more wildly. "Too many have already discovered my retreat. Follow me not, Theresa: I charge thee on thy love for poor Rosalia."

She bounded away from them; and with an agility that seemed superhuman, clomb up amid the shrubs and rocks, and was out of sight in an instant.

We may well suppose that it was not without some feeling of embarrassment, not to say of shyness, occasioned by the strange injunction given by the singular though beautiful being who had just disappeared, that Taverna again addressed himself to the damsel he had rescued. Aware, however, of the awkwardness of his position, he braved it like a true Norman; and again repeated in cheerful and humorous tones, "But whom *has* my good angel given me the happiness of assisting? All about you, fair damoiselle, seems involved in mystery: and delightful as is the recommendation of my doubtless holy but unknown sponsor, it

but makes me the more anxious to know to whom I dedicate the service of my poor lance.

“ You mean, sir knight, that you would be unwilling to put it in rest for an unknown damsel who might be unworthy of its prowess,” replied the young lady with a look of half-saucy forwardness. Then, with a still more self-satisfied air, she added, “ But fear not: Corazza, daughter of the Lord High Admiral, who now thanks you, is not likely to need your services again.”

Such a speech as this could hardly have been uttered by a girl of the same age born in any of our northern climates; but in Sicily, where they are often mothers at thirteen, their manners are, of course, proportionately precocious. We cannot say that the great Norman baron was agreeably impressed by the airs which this daughter of an Italian oil-seller (raised by the favoritism of his sovereign to his present high rank), evidently gave herself. Still his

mind was so taken aback by the surprise which the announcement of her name occasioned him, that he little heeded the manner of the speaker. It was, indeed, a strange coincidence that, while his secret thoughts were running upon plans of self-advancement, and even doubting whether he should not seek fame and power in the wake of the Admiral—that, at that very moment, he should have been called upon to save the daughter of the royal favorite from death or captivity; and that a strange being, apparently half saint and half spirit, should have rushed from the hills and bade him take that daughter for his wife. Our hero, like most men of his time, and indeed, like most men of every time, was not without a degree of superstition: and was willing to flatter himself that heaven had taken extraordinary methods to interfere in his especial behalf. This, however, was not a time to carry on such a train of thoughts: and turning gallantly to the

young lady he exclaimed, "If, as a Norman knight, I before deemed myself most fortunate in having been the means of delivering a lady from an unpleasant situation, how much more do I congratulate myself on my good fortune, as a baron of the kingdom, now that I find that lady to be so exalted by the high rank of her father. Permit me, signorina, to conduct you in safety to the Torre de Baych."

The manner of the young gypsy-looking girl had considerably altered on hearing the rank of her protector; and it was now in a much less capricious tone that she assured him she felt no further danger, that her own escort was sufficient security, and that she would not have him ride aside from his own road on her account.

"It will not be necessary that I should do so, fair damoiselle," insisted the baron. "I have this day left my poor castle of Taverna; and my people already await me

in Palermo. Your road, therefore, is doubly mine."

"Taverna!" thought the young coquette within herself; and a baron of the kingdom! Surely he must be the handsome and powerful baron of Taverna of whom I have heard so much! And, indeed, he is very handsome. I marvel it did not strike me before."

Vulgar and upstart pretension shows itself, in all ages and in all countries, in the same manner. She cast a more timid, or rather, we should say, a less bold look on her companion than she had bestowed on any one for many a month; and, in half-formed sentences, gave him to understand that she not only accepted his escort, but would be flattered by it.

When the principal personages now on our scene had thus introduced themselves to one another, and begun their ride towards Palermo, their followers lost no time in imitating the example set them. Richard

MacMardagh rode beside the female who had called herself Theresa; and putting on his most devoted yet winning smile, he blandly said to her, "By St. Patrick, that was a kind spirit that sought to bring my lord and your lady together! Are such often to be met with in this pretty island of yours, my fair signora?"

"Speak not lightly, I beseech you, gentle squire, of the blessed Saint, the Princess Rosalia—for such she most certainly is. And as it is her pleasure now to withdraw herself from our ken, it would ill become me to speak more of her. Excuse me, then, if I ask you to choose some other subject for your discourse."

"Nay, lady," replied MacMardagh, "I meant not to speak lightly of her. All the world knows that my countrymen of Ireland are famous for the respect they pay the saints:—St. Patrick forgive me for saying that all the world knows it," he added archly, "when the Pope himself is as igno-

rant of the matter as the pagan Saracen whom we drove away from you e'en now ! But, be that as it may, every one except his Holiness, the Pope, knows it : and he, poor man, has so much to do that he has not time to think of us at all ; and so he has decreed that we are barbarians and heathens. That is to say, the other, Adrian, did so ; and I take it this one will think so too, rather than give up all the pennies which the king of England is to send him from Ireland."

"I have heard from a holy English priest at Palermo," replied the young lady, "how your country has been treated ; and, I must say, that, to me, it seems a sad and shameful business."

"Bless your beautiful heart for thinking so !" exclaimed the Irishman. "Oh, I wish the lady Rosalia would present me to you as she did the Baron to the other young lady !"

A shade of displeasure, not unmixed

with a smile at the impetuosity of the young man, came over the calm features of Theresa, like a slight cloud stealing over part of the surface of a shining lake. Her face, indeed, wore such a still and unruffled expression of benignity, that the least feeling of her soul instantly left an impress upon it. Yet that face had neither a perpetual simper nor a look of unmeaning vacancy. On the contrary, it showed that its owner was alive to every thing around her, and could interest herself in whatever interested others; but that, on some one subject, she felt too deeply and too pleasantly ever to forget it, though she allowed her spirit cheerfully to waft other matters over the deep under-current of her mind.

“I see, fair Signora,” resumed the Irishman, “that you are not wont to listen to a plain-speaking honest heart; and you doubt my sincerity because whatever I think rushes out from me without a moment’s hesitation. This is the very quality

that ought to convince you that I am a true man and mean what I say ; especially when I protest that I am more happy to have become acquainted with your Signoria, than with any woman I have seen since I left the green hills of county Sligo. Nay, don't frown ; for I am sure you could not do it if you tried. You must not expect me to be as deceitful as the poor conquered Greeks of this country, nor as wily as the pagan Saracens, nor as rude and overbearing and quarrelsome as the proud Normans who hold them all in thrall : and when I say this against the Normans, please to observe that I do not mean my own good lord, who has never a fault in him except that he is not an Irishman. But you will be tired to hear me talk so much ; or, at all events, I myself am tired of not hearing your sweet voice : so pray tell me how you and the little black-eyed lady found yourselves so far from Palermo and in the hands of those banditti ?”

“ You do, indeed, speak the *lingua franca* of these countries more fluently than any man from the north I have ever met,” replied Theresa, smiling with good humour. “ But, in reply to your question, I really scarce know how we wandered on so far. I had proposed, several times, to return to the city; but the Lady Corazza ever insisted upon going a little further and again a little further: and I had been so much with the young princes and princesses, that I know not how to thwart her.”

“ Or any one else, I hope,” interposed MacMardagh. “ But how,” he asked, “ could you like to leave the family of the king to live with that of the Lord High Admiral, whom every one seems to speak so much against?”

“ Do they?” inquired Theresa. “ In truth, those of a household are not likely soon to hear what is said against it. But I have left the Alcazar for a short time only. At the prayer of the Admiral, the good queen

besought me take his daughter under my charge for a while."

"Perhaps that you might not see his own doings in the palace with the queen, if report speak truth," thought Richard MacMardagh, smiling. Despite of his boasted sincerity, he had, however, judgment enough to keep this thought to himself: and went on to converse on other matters in a manner that certainly won upon the good opinion of his mild companion. Nor could her very pleasing and speaking features conceal the favourable impression he made; and the consequence was that, ere they parted that day, the Irishman had vowed to himself, that he really felt towards her all that he had, at first, insinuated as a matter of course.

Turn we, however, to the other members of our cavalcade. The Baron had been so much occupied with his own thoughts on the singularity of his adventure and on his schemes of ambition, that he had but ill

responded to the lively attempts of the little Lady Corazza to inveigle his attention. Her looks were sprightly and complimentary to himself: but there was a degree of vulgarity in her manner (which his Norman pride attributed, as a matter of course, to the base birth of her father) and of vanity in all she said, that was offensive to his sensibilities after the noble bearing and highmindedness of the Countess Clemence. He soon, therefore, fell back from her side as if to give some directions to his attendants, and rode after her thoughtfully and alone. But the meditations in which he began to indulge, were again soon interrupted. A tall, large-boned man-at-arms, on a gaunt powerful horse like himself, rode up to his side and saluting him with little show of reverence said abruptly: "You do not remember me, my lord. You do not know that I am the man whose throat would soon have become acquainted with Abderachman's scimitar if you had not come to the rescue."

“Were you the person he stood over?” asked the Baron.

“I was. These dastardly eunuchs,” pointing to his companions, “had fled at the Saracen’s approach. I, alone, could do nothing against him. You saved my life. It is a boon for which I thank you. Professions from one like me would seem but idle talk: but the time may come when Gavarretto may be able to repay the great Baron of Taverna.”

Without waiting for farther parley, he rode back to his fellows. But on learning his name, Taverna was not sorry to have made a friend of one who was reported to be the trusted, the unscrupulous and the faithful creature of the High Admiral.

Meanwhile the cavalcade was rapidly descending from the ridge of hills and approaching the populous city beneath them. How beautiful was the view that stretched out on all sides around! Even those pre-occupied and worldly-minded characters of

whom we write, could not approach that favoured Palermo—thrice favoured in its glorious situation—unmoved by the enchanting scene. The noisy and busy city at the foot of its amphitheatre of hills, the distant ridges of the courtly Begaria on the right, the picturesque mountain of Pellegrino on the left, and that bright glassy sea bathing all the shore with liquid diamonds, flashing back the rays of the evening sun, and bearing upon its glowing bosom the countless navies of the kingdom (so numerous as to require an admiral in every station), the commercial vessels of Europe, Africa, and Constantinople, and the armed galleys of many a northern crusader who loitered amid the delights of Sicily on his way to the Holy Land, must have moved the coldest heart. Add to this that the air was perfumed by the fragrance of every odoriferous tree and shrub that blooms in the most favoured climates, and you will have some idea—no, you will still be unable

to form any idea equal to that most lovely scene.

Slowly the cavalcade passed through the fortified gate of St. Agatha, and then, through a narrow street, approached the broad square before the Alcazar,—the Saracen, and, therefore, popular name for the royal palace. The broad banner of the Norman king floated on a staff before it; and countless numbers passed and repassed in every direction. Beside the banner, rose several gibbets; and from three of these, fresh slain corpses still dangled. The horrid state of the faces of the dead showed that, before their execution, they had been subjected to the king's favourite punishment of the bason:—that is to say, heated basons or plates had been held before their eyes until the sight was perfectly burned out. Hard by the gibbets, lay three or four other bodies purposely left there to be mangled by the dogs that were already beginning to collect round about: and the corpses still

on the gibbets had been so much lowered for the same purpose, that their knees bent upon the ground, and invited the curs that came and smelt around them in turn. Of the many passers to and fro through the square, none seemed to heed these evidences of a recent execution: still every face bore an expression of constraint and of smothered dissatisfaction. Men-at-arms stood heedlessly under the palace walls, and jested boisterously or slept on benches in the shade with the usual thoughtlessness of successful soldiers.

The Baron of Taverna beckoned his squire to his side, and asked him, in an undertone, if he knew the cause of the butcheries before them.

“That is what I have just been trying to find out from the very talkative man-at-arms whose life your lordship saved,” replied Richard: “and with a great deal of trouble, I have gained so much as to be able to state that the great Prince of Capua

has been taken on the point of rising in arms against the sovereign, or of being suspected of rising; and, with his eyes basoned, has been shut up in one of the snug wards below the palace yonder: while these poor creatures whom the dogs do not, to say truth, seem much to fancy, were accused of being his accomplices. But look there, Monseigneur," he continued in a lower voice: "see that man in the purple cognisance of the archbishop, which peers through the ragged great cloak he has cast over it: see; he is throwing a stone at that dog which comes too close to the furthest body on the gibbet. I would wager this dagger to a helmet of gold that the dead man is some kinsman of the great archbishop; and that yon seeming beggar is put to watch it till night-fall. If it be so, more will come of it."

The young lady Corazza here called the baron to her side and made some trifling remark on a slight pageant that was passing

at the other side of the square. While she was yet speaking, they turned into a street which ran in the same direction as the present splendid Cassaro, (so called by a corruption of Alcazar) and approached the fortified ward in which the Saracen population of the city dwelt together. No town in Europe has more changed in appearance than has Palermo during the seven centuries that have slipped away since the days of which we write; though sufficient traces of that which then was, still exist to the eye of the antiquary. Stretching around the beautiful bason of the sea, from the old custom house to the modern palace of Conte Federigo, the Kalah then overflowed the delicious Marina and ran up beside each of these now inland points and formed a spacious harbour, ending in the little streams of Papirato and Oreto. But this noble harbour was then parted in two by the body of the city, placed upon a tongue of land that ran out from the palace at the

upper end as far as the Torre di Baych at the lower extremity. The interval between these two extremes of the peninsula was divided into three wards: the centre one of which was, as we have before observed, allotted to the Saracen population of the city. Our cavalcade rode through their narrow streets containing shops and bazaars crowded with the richest merchandise in Europe; and passing thence into the third compartment of the town, approached the spot where now stands the church of Sant' Antonio, in the heart of a crowded city. Here, at the time of which we write, was the extreme point of the land, surrounded on three sides by the blue waters of the finest harbour in the world: and here stood the Saracen tower of Baych—now the residence of the Lord High Admiral; or, to give him his proper title, of the Lord Admiral of Admirals.

CHAPTER II.

“Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream :
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council ; and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.”—*Julius Cæsar*.

WHAT a glorious opportunity now presents itself to us, to discuss the history, material, and form of crowns and sceptres,—from the first fillet that bound the brows of an Eastern prince, and the sceptre which Homer’s chieftain asseverates shall sooner bud and bloom again in its native forest than he forego his anger, down to the jewelled regalia of our own gracious sovereign! Antiquaries would delight therein. But all the world are not antiquaries, and we write for all the world; who would

much rather receive our statements upon our own word, than be delayed by long disquisitions in proof of their veracity. Let it be believed that we pen nothing without warrant of authority.

In a small room of the fortified tower of Baych, lighted by a large window, deep set in its northern wall and hanging over the beautiful kalah or port of Palermo, stood a tall, corpulent, jovial-faced man, beside a table of white marble, encased in a broad rim of gold. His face, which beamed with ruddy good humour, was fringed by masses of stiff hair of the bluest black, and lighted up by an eye so large, bright, sparkling, and intelligent, that the beholder marvelled how the mind that eye bespoke could condescend to dwell in a body that seemed made for nothing but the easy pleasures of a careless life. And yet, with all its playful vivacity, there was, at times, a meaning in that eye that belied the no-meaning of the body. On the other side of the table stood

a withered Saracen artizan, in the dress of his people, apparently cringing before the jovial lord; but, whenever he could do so unobserved, darting up furtive glances with an expression which showed that he plainly read the great man's secret soul, and inwardly chuckled at the discoveries he made. He was a small, spare, pale-complexioned man, and his body, unlike that of his patron, seemed to be all over-wrought by the wear and tear of the mind within. But appearances (whatever physiognomists may say to the contrary) are deceptive: the man of flesh was the man of great thoughts, while the studious-looking Saracen had only the cunning of a little spirit. The looks and the thoughts of both these personages seemed intent upon the furniture of the marble table between them. There lay, upon folds of white satin and leather, from which they had evidently been even then unpacked, a regal crown and sceptre. The sceptre was a plain

golden staff, nearly six feet long, crooked at the upper end like that borne by the early kings of France. The crown was a highly radiated Eastern crown of gold; but at the top of each pointed ray, were placed little golden ornaments, in the shape of beaks and sterns of ships, but sparkling with diamonds like the evening star. Both the beholders looked at them with admiration. At length the fat man spoke.

“Well, Azab,” he cried, in a tone of exultation; “I swear by the holy Madonna, that it is a rare device. Dost thou not think so?”

“Who shall gainsay the word of the Lord High Admiral!” answered the artizan, laying his hand on his forehead, as he reverently bowed it. “Your servant has worked long at Constantinople; but I never there saw anything put better out of hand.”

“I speak not, man, of the handicraft of it,” replied the High Admiral indignantly: “you artizans can never raise your minds

above the mere mechanical part of your calling. I spoke of the device of the crown, so much more noble and imposing than the one adopted by his grace the king."

"Truly, monsignore, it is," answered the workman doubtingly; then, as though he were treading upon a floor of thin ice, such as occasionally skimmed over the ponds of that sunny region, he added, still more doubtingly, "the device of the rays and of the naval ornaments at their points is so—so very appropriate—to——"

"To what? speak out, good Azab," exclaimed Majone. "Never utter a half-finished sentence. It is apt to make people think, either that thou art a fool, afraid of thine own thoughts, or that thou harbourest some design that thou art fearful of betraying. Always speak out openly, good Azab; frankly, good Azab. Speak as I do. Thanks to the favour of my lord the king, I have as many weighty matters on my mind as most people; but no one

can say that I speak or look as if I were afraid of them. Honesty, good Azab, is always frank."

"Surely your lordship would not have your servant utter his every thought?" asked the Saracen, with a look and tone bordering upon familiar cunning.

"Wherefore not, man?" said the Lord High Admiral. "Why shouldst thou think thoughts beyond thy calling? I need not tell, then, that secrets may be entrusted even to such as thee, which should not be unveiled. Such secrets I myself, and every person in power, must have store of; but there is no need on this account to begin babbling dangerous sentences, and to boggle over forbidden thoughts. Such secrets should be, at once, stored away, till the time comes for acting upon them. They should no more thrust themselves into thine every-day talk, than the thoughts of thy craft should intrude amid thy prayers to thy prophet,—whom may heaven curse. Dost thou understand, good Azab?"

“I humbly hope so, monsignore; and therefore—”

“And therefore, good fellow,” interposed Majone, “stow away, as carefully as thou wilt stow away the purse of gold I shall give thee anon, all recollection that thou hast made this crown and sceptre for me, and that I am keeping them here ready to make a present of them to our lord the king on his birthday. Forget all that, good Azab, until thou seest them on his royal person! and then speak, an thou wilt, till thou crack thy thin voice, with boasting that they are thy handicraft. Do this, and I will then give thee another purse as weighty as this one which I now bestow in token that I am well pleased with thee. Farewell, good Azab, farewell.”

“On my life be it to obey your lordship in all things,” meekly replied the Saracen, with a look of more intelligence than he had yet allowed the High Admiral to read

in his face : then bowing low with eastern reverence, he backed out of the room.

“ So, so : I doubt me if that fellow can make much of his secret, on the footing I have placed it,” said the Lord High Admiral Majone to himself, as the goldsmith left the apartment. “ Beautiful baubles !” he exclaimed, turning towards them, and lifting up his plump, large hands in rapture above the table ; “ beautiful baubles, it is worth something to possess ye even in secret. Beautiful in yourselves, and more beautiful still for the power which ye betoken in him who bears ye ! And fools only will say that you are worthless in yourselves. Whatever draws the admiration and respect of men, women, or children, should be cherished by the wise. So, so : let us see how they will fit my lord the king’s person,” he added, taking up the sceptre : “ well, right well ; and it becomes mine own grasp also to a marvel ! The crown, too : I should not be

surprised if it sat not the less well upon these brows," he said, placing it with both hands on his lofty forehead. "Methinks it must become me to perfection; nor is it so weighty as some people assert. I doubt not I could bear it up, with this good staff to rest upon," he added, grasping the sceptre. "However—however; patience—patience: thou hast done pretty well thus far, Giorgio Majone, my Lord High Admiral of admirals. Bide thy time—bide thy time. But it is as well to be prepared. It is as well to have these pretty things at hand in case of need; it would look better to come forth in the full effulgence of royalty. First impressions are the most important impressions of any. But enough, enough; patience, patience. Let us put them away—put them away."

So musing, he raised the glittering jewelry from the table, and placed it in a recess behind the silk hangings of the walls, dropping and locking over them an

oaken door, bound with massive hinges, and closed with two of the strong ornamented locks of the days of old.

“And now,” he continued to himself, striding up and down the room, and rubbing his hands joyously, “now for my lord the Archbishop. He is a clever man, and a popular man, and what fools call a conscientious man, to boot; but I fancy I have hooked his reverence. That hanging of his kinsman was an excellent thought—”

The door was here suddenly burst open, and in rushed one of those unfortunate beings who were then the fashionable attendants in royal and princely houses—namely, a deformed Saracen eunuch. The poor creature was dressed in the richest attire; but there was little time to notice this, as he rushed in, making a loud gurgling noise in his throat, from which the tongue had been cut out at the root, to prevent him from betraying the secrets of his masters. He gesticulated violently

with his arms to supply his sad inability to speak.

“What, in the fiend’s name, ails thee, Hadjar !” cried the admiral, as he hastily left the room.

On the stairs, he met another servant, who, in reply to his anxious inquiries, rendered more anxious still by a knowledge of the guilty course he was even then entering upon, informed him that news was just brought that the Signorina Corazza and her escort had been attacked in the mountains, and carried off by the notorious outlaw Abderachman. The father—and Majone was a fond father—was violently moved by this unexpected intelligence. He did not, however, lose his presence of mind ; but calmly gave orders that a score of men at arms should instantly saddle their horses, while he himself would don his gambaiso, and prepare to scour the country with them in pursuit of the robbers. He returned into his own rooms ; and a

quarter of an hour afterwards, came forth again, hastily armed, and descended into the small court-yard of the fortress. A number of armed followers already sat in their high-peaked saddles. The father said a few words to them, and they were on the point of sallying out beneath the low-browed archway, when Corazza, with the Baron of Taverna at her side, and followed by their scanty escort, came in sight through the open portal. Majone leapt from his saddle with an exclamation of gratitude to Providence; and hastening to his daughter's palfrey, clasped her in his arms, and pressed her little figure to his broad breast as he lifted her to the pavement. Corazza returned his kiss affectionately, and taking his hand, said, "You must thank the noble Baron of Taverna, father: it is he who has saved your little cingara."

"And right glad I am to be beholden to the Baron," exclaimed Majone, courteously

hastening up to him. "Per Bacco, I had rather be beholden to the Barone di Taverna, than to any other lord in Sicily. Dismount, dismount, noble signor; and let me quickly hear all about my daughter's folly and your valour."

"Nay, then, my Lord High Admiral," answered Taverna, "if you are about to charge the Lady Corazza with folly, I must e'en, as a true knight, come down to her rescue."

He dismounted, and the three together went up stairs to the room Majone had but just left.

"Now, noble signore," cried the admiral, shaking the baron's two hands warmly in his own, "now let me hear the manner of this fortunate occurrence which has awakened between our houses such an alliance of feeling. May it be as lasting as it is acceptable!"

The upper lip of Don Matteo slightly curled when the son of the oil-seller alluded

to their two houses; but the feeling of scorn soon passed away; and when, as he ended the sentence, the admiral gazed from the baron to his daughter with a frank and unmistakeable meaning, the young man's ambition threw every scornful feeling into the shade, and he at once acceded to the friendly position in which the intriguer sought to place him.

“My heart, monsignore,” he answered, “blesses the meeting as warmly as can even your parental affections. But it is not to my lance, but to the stout resistance which a good knave of your own showed the robbers, that I deem the sweet signorina Corazza mainly indebted. He delayed the banditti till I and my men came up.”

“Not so, father!” exclaimed the young lady, desirous perhaps to escape, by talking herself, from the equivocal position in which the admiral and her preserver seemed mutually inclined to place her. “Not so. I will tell you all about it. The air was so cool

that we had rode out rather further than usual, when, all at once, out rushes this Saracen, with half-a-dozen others at his back. The eunuchs discharged a flight of arrows, with their eyes shut, and, of course, ran away. Good Gavarretto, however, awaited the coming on of Abderachman, and stoutly exchanged blows with him. He was unhorsed, I know not how; when just as I had turned away my head, to avoid seeing the Saracen cut his throat, the noble baron dashed down the hill, and charged the robber like a true Norman knight; while a white spirit flew down the side of the mountain, and made incantations over him, waving her long arms in the air. The robber could not be expected to stand against heaven and earth, so he backed into the forest, while the vision came up and presented us to each other."

"A vision presented you to each other!" cried the admiral. "Per Bacco, but I am beholden to it. What said the spirit, my child?"

“Oh, some nonsense that I forget; and that the Signor of Taverna has forgotten long ago,” she said with an arch look at the baron, as she turned on her heel and tripped lightly out of the room.

“I am glad she is gone,” observed Majone thoughtfully, while with wonderful frankness of manner, he motioned the young man to a couch in the deep window, and sat down beside him. “I am glad she is gone, because her story, lightly as it was told, led me to understand, at once, the motive of the fellow Abderachman; and it is right that you should know my surmises, that we may take counsel together. I should have consulted with you before, but that you have kept aloof from the court more than your friends would wish; and, of those friends and well-wishers, let me say, at once, that you have none warmer than Giorgio Majone. Nay, do not interrupt me. We shall be better friends for the future. This Abderachman is, then, the

last survivor of the powerful Saracen family who formerly owned your castle of Cacabo with some goodly lands about it. The property was forfeit, as a matter of course, to you Normans when you conquered the country; and came honourably into the hands of your father. War and the gibbet have given a good account of the old pagan family; so that this Abderachman, who was formerly but a disreputable hanger-on of the parent stock, is now, it seems, the head of the household."

"Can he be so well descended?" asked Taverna in surprise.

"He is so; and, as head of his family, he considers himself the rightful owner of your castle of Cacabo. He had done me some irregular services, and has oftentimes pressed me to restore it to him. He has even appealed to the king, who, you know, always favours the Saracens; and has brought charges of disloyalty against yourself, to which your absence from court

gave some appearance of colour. I ought not to say so, but, to you, I will venture to own that our good lord the king is rather given to avarice and bloodthirstiness; and that I have had some difficulty in prevailing upon him to withhold his warrant against you. I succeeded, however; and from the threats half-uttered by this Abderachman, I have now no doubt that he intended to carry Corazza into the mountains, and to hold her there as a hostage, until I allowed the king to wreak his vengeance on you, and to restore Cacabo to him. The scheme, you see, is not very deep laid."

"Is it possible," cried the young man impetuously, "that the king, whose father my father so well and truly served, should thus deem towards me!"

"My son, 'put not your trust in princes,' was said long ago," replied the Lord Admiral, with an expression of sincere sympathy. "But," he added, "I have some

influence over him; I can at times moderate his passions: and, now that you and I are become acquainted, fear not that he will again move against you. Should there be danger, I can always forewarn you."

"What! am I, the descendant of William of Bonnel, to live in fear of the descendant of Tancred of Hauteville!" cried the baron haughtily. "Never! by my father's spirit, I swear it; never!"

"Calm yourself," my son, interposed Majone: "Calm yourself, although I own the provocation would move a saint to rebellion."

"Rebellion!" ejaculated Taverna, in a faltering tone of inquiry. "I spoke not of rebellion."

"Far be it from me to suggest that you did," answered the tempter; "and yet you proud Normans, who have ever elected your king for his personal worth, have not always been so fearful of asserting your own rights."

“Fear, my Lord Admiral! do you mean to insinuate that I am fearful of William of Hauteville?”

“My dear young friend, I mean to insinuate nothing,” replied the admiral. “I am a good easy man, who always speak my mind and endeavour to do my duty to my king and to my friends; and am only pained when the one compels me to injure the other. But all loyal subjects would rather suffer in their own persons than right themselves at the expense of their sovereign; and I cannot be expected to take up their quarrels more warmly than they do themselves. For example, there is the good archbishop, whose kinsman the king has lately done to death with his wonted cruelties and indignities. I did all in my power to save him, though the archbishop misdoubts me, and broods on plans of vengeance without knowing whom to involve in them. He is a kinsman of your own, my lord, and greatly should I be

indebted to you if you would act as mediator between us. You have laid me under a great obligation to-day, which little Corazza's gratitude and mine can never repay: confer upon me another. See the archbishop on my part; assure him, on mine honour, that I had no hand in the death of his relative, and bring him with you this evening to sup at my poor board."

"Nay, but"—expostulated the baron.

"Nay," interposed the admiral, "I know that I am taking a liberty with your lordship, but I have personally waited on the archbishop, and he refuses to see me. There is much that ought to be said between us: much in which your interests and his are deeply involved; and I would take counsel with you both how to turn the king aside from his good will to Abderachman at your expense. Appease his reverence, therefore, and bring him with you at nightfall. We will sup quite alone; not even Corazza shall be of the party."

We think we have already seen enough of our hero's character to warrant us in anticipating that he would not withstand so pressing a suggestion. Majone had artfully awakened in him so much resentment against the king, and so much anxiety as to his supposed hostility towards himself, that the wavering young man felt the want of counsel by which to guide himself; and, a stranger as he was at Palermo, was grateful for the seeming kindness of the king's favourite minister, and for the suggestion which called to his help the advice of his kinsman the archbishop. He left the Torre di Baych with a promise to return with the archbishop in the evening.

“Bravo! bravo, Giorgio Majone,” ejaculated the Lord High Admiral to himself, as soon as the other left the room. “Bravo! all goes well to-day,” and his burley person skipped up and down the room, while he rubbed his hands and snapped his fingers in glee. “In very truth,” he continued,

“the king does love the Saracens, and does love an unusual allowance of blood and cruelty; but the good man had no more to do with the death of the priest’s kinsman, and knows no more of Abderachman’s projects against this foolish Norman baron, than the babe unborn. How fortunate for me that the fool sucks in suspicions as the sandy beach sucks in a shower of rain! But his name amongst his fellows has a charm derived from his father; and he is wealthy, and therefore powerful. He must be secured:—no very difficult matter. I will make him wed Corazza; the bond will tie him to my interest, and will raise me in the eyes of his compeers. Plague on this lowly birth of mine! It is the only thing a man cannot get over: he cannot ennoble his father. However, *patienza*—*patienza*! I have not forgotten you, pretty baubles;” and he shook his fist good-humouredly as he passed the recess in which the crown and sceptre were concealed. “*Patienza, patienza, I will wear ye yet!*”

He clapped his hands together, and the speechless eunuch we have mentioned again stood before him.

“Let Gavaretto be sought for and brought hither,” he said.

In a few minutes the man-at-arms entered the room. “Gavaretto,” said the admiral, “thou hast done me good service to-day in defending the lady Corazza to the best of thine ability. No one does me good service without being rewarded, nor strives to injure me without punishment. The keeper of the royal prisons under the palace has disobeyed orders: he has allowed the prince of Capua to roam at large in his cell, instead of keeping him in irons. I have had the fellow basoned for his pains. The post of head jailor is vacant, and I give it to thee. Be faithful, be secret, and ever remember whose creature thou art.”

Gavaretto took the hand of his patron, and bore it to his lips. Then, without saying a word, he wheeled round his gaunt person and left the room.

At nine o'clock on the evening of that day, the Archbishop of Palermo and the Lord of Taverna entered the apartment of the Torre di Baych, with which we are already familiar. They were met at the door by the High Admiral; who bent on one knee and craved the blessing of the Archbishop. "Take it, my son," said the latter, signing the cross over him: "and now," he added, "since you assure me, through my kinsman Matteo, that you had no part in the death of my poor cousin, take my hand once more in friendship."

"On mine honour!" cried Majone, casting himself into the open arms of the priest.

Taverna, moved by a feeling of delicacy to turn aside from witnessing whatever explanation might ensue, had sauntered on through an open door; and in a larger room adjoining, found the Lady Corazza before a musical instrument. She was reclining in a graceful, but languishing attitude. Her full black eyes were bent down with an expression of sorrow. Her hair

was rather dishevelled, and fell upon her bare shoulders, from which the lace veil, embroidered with pearls and rubies, had slipped off. She started when the knight entered the room ; and, coming quickly towards him, exclaimed, " Oh, monsignore, this is a happy chance. I was told that I was not to meet you to-night ; and yet I wished so much to crave your forgiveness for my ungrateful and light bearing towards you this morning."

" Beautiful Corazza," said the baron, taking her willing hand, " I know not to what you can possibly allude. What can I have to forgive in you ?"

" Oh, I spoke slightly of the great benefit you had rendered me. I did not, I feel I did not, thank you as I ought to have done. What might have become of me had you not come up in time to deliver me ?"

" But, indeed, my interference," expostulated Taverna, " were not worth mentioning, saving only that it gave me the opportunity of assisting you."

“ And, therefore, I ought to have shown my gratitude,” persisted the little wily gipsy in a sobbing tone. “ But, indeed—indeed, my heart felt, and gave the lie to my words.”

With an assumed childish simplicity of manner, she pressed his hand to her lips: and then, as if overcome by her feelings, rushed from the apartment.

“ What a strange, wilful, pretty child she is!” thought the Norman to himself. His reflections, however, were soon cut short by the entrance of the admiral and the archbishop arm-in-arm, and showing, by their bearing to one another, that all ill will was at an end between them. They were both men of about the same age, but singularly different in their manner and appearance. Hugo, Archbishop of Palermo, had the bearing of a noble Norman: yet his tall, spare form had a stoop which one could not account for until one observed the pale face, the hollow glance, and the measured language of the student. His broad forehead

was already bald ; and, ever and anon, he drew himself up, as if from the desk, with a proud toss of the head and a sudden flash of the eye, that contrasted strangely with his usual calm and listless manner. He was making some observation on the disappearance of the Lady Corazza, of whose retreating figure he had caught a glimpse as he entered the room, when the chamberlain of the high admiral entered and asked his master, in a tone of voice that seemed intended to draw the attention of the guests, whether the usual retinue should wait at supper.

“ No, good Adinolfo,” said the admiral. “ Not even thyself ; for mine honoured guests do not know how much I prize thee, and might feel shy of speaking before thee. No ; let the mute Hadjar alone wait upon us. What an improvement upon nature is the device of these mutes !” he exclaimed joyfully to his friends as the chamberlain withdrew. “ Some may blame nature for

being too prodigal of her gifts ; but not so do I. We can always curtail those which might be inconvenient. Now a servant without a tongue is an admirable piece of mechanism ; it can hear, it can see, it can do all you require of it ; and it can never repeat what it has overheard : and if you think even this mechanism too complicated, it is easy to take away the hearing and to leave only the sight : and in some instances, I have known masters who found it useful to possess a blind slave who had the full enjoyment of his other faculties.”

“No more of this, I pray you, admiral,” said the archbishop gravely.

“No more, indeed,” rejoined the other, “for here comes some one to tell us that supper waits. I am glad of it ; for I am so overjoyed at the events of this day, in having recovered my friend and my daughter, and in having struck up an alliance with my young friend here, that I shall do justice to it ; so I hope will you, Don Matteo, of Taverna.”

He gave a hand to each, and led them into a small apartment, lined throughout with slabs of polished white marble, in which a table was spread before them.

We will not describe what they eat and drank: it is what they thought and said that interests us. And, in truth, little was said at first beyond allusions to the events of the day. Gradually these deepened in interest. Gradually Majone spoke of the claims of Abderachman on the estates of the baron, and of the king's favourable inclinations towards the Saracen. Gradually the recent imprisonment of the Prince of Capua came to be spoken of; and the innocence, not only of the prince, but of the unfortunate kinsman of the archbishop, came to be asserted.

“ You swear that you had no hand in his death ? ” at length asked the archbishop earnestly.

“ By all the saints I swear it ! ” fervently responded Majone. “ And,” he added,

setting his teeth and speaking in a hollow tone, but with the same heedless frankness of manner, "I marvel that your reverence submits to the indignity."

"I was not sure who was my enemy," replied the other. "But before we say more," he added, "permit me to ask the meaning of words you used as we came into this room: you said that you had, this day, struck up an alliance with my young kinsman of Taverna. What meant you? Have you given him the hand of the Lady Corazza?"

"Per Bacco!" cried Majone in his usual good-humoured style, "per Bacco, he has not done me the honour of asking for it."

"Then I crave it, for him," said the archbishop. "It is an alliance desirable for you both: for you, admiral, in that Taverna is one of the most powerful of our Norman barons whom it is desirable that you should bind to your interests: for you, Taverna, in that the admiral is all-powerful with this king who threatens your possessions. I am

sure my kinsman will gladly promote so desirable an union ; and that the Lady Corazza is too well brought up to oppose herself to the will of her father. It is a pity she is so young : she seems almost a child."

"Not so much a child as she looks," said her father : "she is almost fourteen years old."

"Well, then, what say you both to my plan ?"

Taverna's feelings were so contradictory as to prevent him from replying immediately, as in politeness bound to do. How strangely, he thought to himself, was the injunction of the pale figure in the forest about to be realised ! And then the connexion, although grating to his feelings of family pride, was certainly the road to safety, nay to power and fame. And then the Countess Clemence had even on that very day refused his suit. And Corazza was very pretty ; and that very evening she had evidently shown a liking for him which flattered his vanity, which

he mistook for his heart—as many men do.

“Well, Matteo?” asked the archbishop rather impatiently.

“If the lord admiral will deign to accept me as his son,” faltered the baron, holding out his hand towards him.

“Nay, I will answer with my usual frankness,” said the other. “I accept you joyfully, monsignore, and hasten to embrace my honoured son.”

He rose from the table and folded Taverna, who rose to meet him, to his ample chest; rubbing both his black whiskers against the well-trimmed cheeks of the young man.

“That is well settled,” said the archbishop as the two resumed their seats. “Of course, the marriage cannot take place immediately. The child is too young. But now to business.”

“To business, be it,” said Majone slowly. “Again I ask how long is the cruelty and tyranny of this man to be borne? You, my

lord archbishop, are a Norman: you are connected with many of the Norman lords, and see how they are oppressed and made of little account. I myself am an Italian; but I cannot see, much less appear to be the prompter of, the indignities the Normans suffer without feeling my spirit rebel within me; while it is also moved by the grinding avarice of the king which exacts from the native people their substance that it may be hoarded in the coffers of the state."

"Is there no hope of moving his mind to better counsels?" inquired the archbishop.

"Yourself can best answer the question," replied the admiral. "You know what remonstrances have been made on many accounts, but chiefly on account of the difficulties he interposes to such matters as we have just now so happily contracted. You know what anger has been excited in disappointed lovers, not to mention fading dames, by his constant rule not to allow the female owners of fiefs to marry until they

are so old that the properties are likely to revert to the crown in default of children. You know how many partial rebellions have broken out owing to a thousand different acts of tyranny. Do these move him? They move him but to renewed vengeance and renewed acts of cruelty. No: I know him well. So long as he lives, there is no hope for the country."

"Good God! you would not murder him!" cried the archbishop.

"I, for one, would never be a party to such an act!" added Taverna, encouraged to speak out by the horror expressed by the priest.

"Nay, your reverence, nay, my son," expostulated Majone, "do I look like a murderer? Do I look like a man of blood?"

His ruddy good-humoured face certainly gave the lie to such an imputation; and his allies were about to say so, when a loud rap was heard at the door, and the chamberlain Adinolfo entered saying, "Your

pardon, monsignore, but a messenger is just come from the Alcazar, saying that the King craves your attendance forthwith."

"Madonna santissima!" exclaimed Majone; "I am engaged. Go thyself to the palace, good Adinolfo, and present my duty to my lord the king, and tell him that I have been so agitated by the danger of my daughter this afternoon, that I have taken to my bed, far from well; but that if his grace has a real wish to see me before to-morrow morning, I will rise instantly, and come to him."

"And if the king's interest in your lordship should lead him to come here himself to see you?" suggested the chamberlain.

"Fear not, good Adinolfo; much as he loves me, he loves his own ease better: so, go thy ways."

The attendant left the room, and the friends refilled their glasses. But this little incident had marvellously forwarded the plot they were concocting. When they

recurred to the subject, it was no longer a new thought, but was as familiar to their minds as it would have been at a second meeting planned to debate it. This was the effect of the interruption upon the Archbishop and Taverna. The high admiral had turned the pause to even better account. The exclamations of the two whom he sought to win over had shewn him that he must proceed more warily, and discover only a portion of his designs,—that they would be no parties to the death of the king, and to the placing on his own person the crown and sceptre he had so fondly prepared. When, therefore, the other two recurred again to the topic more freely, as to a matter with which their minds were already familiar, he himself met them with increased wariness; and was heedful, by concealing his ultimate designs, to say nothing that could shock the habits of thought of great feudal lords of those days,—of lords who felt themselves

aggrieved by their compeer, the sovereign. During a prolonged sitting, it was finally determined that the king had shewn himself unfit to reign ; that he should therefore be deposed, and his eldest son, Roger, elevated in his place. To this, Majone readily assented, in the hope that, during a revolution, there would be a greater chance of carrying out his own views. The time and manner of doing the deed of justice, as they termed it,—of justice to themselves and country,—was then discussed. Majone remarked upon the growing discontent of the barons and of the people ; showed that the passions of both had been newly aroused by the imprisonment of the Prince of Capua, and the accumulated deeds of cruelty the king had lately done. The archbishop well knew that this anger was principally directed against Majone, whom all considered to be, as he really was, the prime mover in every deed of iniquity ; but it now suited his own purposes to forget

this ; and he gladly heard from the admiral the avowal, that almost every place of authority in the kingdom or in the navy was already filled by his own creatures ; that the guards, and even the eunuchs, of the palace were brought over to him ; and that nothing remained to be done, but to excite still further the anger of the Norman barons.

“ And this,” said the admiral, “ can best be done by removing the three or four who alone are attached to him. There is, for example, Robert of Basseville, his maternal cousin ; Eberard, Count of Squillace ; and Simon, Count of Policastro, his bastard brother : nothing will ever detach these from him ; we must, therefore, detach him from them. This will be easy, for he is ever suspicious of his relatives.”

“ But cannot this be avoided ?” interposed Taverna.

“ My son,” observed the archbishop, “ I feel that it is a sad necessity : but as we

have agreed that it is good to remove the tyrant from the power of working evil, all those who would support him must be looked upon as partners in his crimes. Part we, however, for the night. I will attend at the palace to-morrow, admiral, and will give my voice in support of whatever your greater experience may have set on foot. You also, kinsman, had best show yourself there, to uphold your own interests while yet he encumbers the throne, and to be ready to take part in whatever our judgment shall have decided upon. Admiral, I give you good night. May the saints look approvingly upon our endeavours to wrest this country, which our fathers freed from the pagans, from the still greater tyranny of Christians."

"Amen," replied Majone devoutly, as he prepared to accompany his guests to the drawbridge of the tower. "Bless thee, my son," he said, embracing Taverna ere he mounted his horse. "I thank heaven that

has formed so dear a tie between us ; may it be cemented by faith and perfected by prosperity.”

He returned in-doors ; and soon after sought his pillow, where he slept the quiet sleep of innocence, until the sun was high in the blue, cloudless skies.

Thus have we brought to a close the first eventful day and night that opened upon this true chronicle.

CHAPTER III.

“ A hungry, lean-faced villain,
A mere anatomy, a mountebank,
A threadbare juggler and a fortune teller,
A needy, hollow-eyed, sharp-looking wretch,
A living dead man :—this pernicious slave,
Forsooth took on him as a conjurer ;
And gazing in mine eyes, feeling my pulse,
And with no face, as 'twere outfacing me,
Cries out I was possessed.”—*Comedy of Errors*.

WE must now request the reader to accompany us to La Rocca, as the Sicilians termed it,—the Alcazar as it was called by the Saracens,—in fact, to the ancient Saracenic citadel, now the residence of the Norman kings of Sicily and Naples. Let us pass from the Cassaro under the wide gateway that leads into the vast court, around which the new lords of Sicily have reared, in the far south, a residence on the plan of those

northern keeps, familiar ever to their recollections. The building runs round the four sides of the court ; and although eventually defended by strong towers at each of the angles, but two of these are yet erected, though Greek and Saracenic workmen are even now engaged in raising the third. Leaving the newly-built chapel (still in complete preservation, and the most perfect relic of ancient times) on the other hand, let us ascend the great staircase, to the third storey,—for the two lower ranges are occupied as prisons, guard-rooms, and menial offices ; and before turning from the wide corridor that runs all round the court, and leads to the different apartments, let us pause a moment, to examine one of the greatest rarities of the age—a clock moved by a pendulum, erected by the late king on the wall of his chapel, and of which he was so justly proud, that he inserted near it an inscription, in Latin, Greek, and Arabic, the three written languages of the country,

to record the achievement: the Latin inscription is as follows:—

“Hoc opus horologii præcepit fieri
Dominus magnificus Rex Rogerius
Anno Incarnationis Domini 1142,
Anno, vero, regni ejus 13 feliciter.”

Let us pass through that square door of wood, the panels of which are so beautifully moulded and overlaid with the carved leaves of that unknown flower: let us pass the guards and the mutes, who watch the approaches to the royal apartment with all the ceremony and jealousy used in palaces of the Byzantine emperors; they make way for us, and we stand in the favourite morning room of the king. It is indeed dazzling at first; but when the eye becomes accustomed to it, you will marvel how so much splendour could be combined with so little gaudiness. At the corners of the room, small Norman pillars of marble rise to the domed ceiling; this, as well as the walls, is totally encrusted with the richest mosaics. On a ground of gold, are seen Norman huntsmen, armed

with cross-bows, while stags fly before them; and peacocks with spreading tails are interspersed, as an excuse for introducing the most splendid colours. Leopards, lions, and other beasts of the chase, beloved of Norman sovereigns, cover the carved ceiling with the richest tints, harmonized, on a golden ground, by the skill of the best artists from Constantinople.

Such is the appearance of this room even now remaining in the palace of Palermo: it tells us plainly whence later ages, unable to command the gorgeous materials and the tasteful workmen of the east, took the idea of those hangings of leather stamped with gold which once covered the bare walls of the halls of England. But a truce to investigation. We stand in the presence of royalty.

William the First of Sicily (whom history has stamped by an unflattering but descriptive epithet as "William the Bad") was, like all his family, remarkable for his great strength, his noble bearing, and handsome

features. These features had, however, a soddened, pale, and unhealthy look, as he now lay at full length upon a low couch, his half-clad limbs swathed in a sort of loose dressing gown of purple satin. In another part of the room, his queen, Margaret, a handsome woman in the prime of life, conversed with the young girl named Theresa, —the friend of the Lady Corazza, whom we have before met; while on the carpet in the midst, gamboled the two royal children, Roger and William (handsome, intelligent boys of the age of seven and six years), and their aunt Constance. The latter was a pretty little girl, rather younger than the youngest of the two, being the posthumous daughter of the present king's father by his third wife. The children, as we say, were playing upon the carpet: and amid much merry prattle, were trying to form gay pictures, by placing together little square pieces of coloured ivory and gilt wood, in imitation of the mosaics on the walls of the

room. The king lay listlessly watching them from his low cushions, ever and anon joining in their babble, or answering some eager inquiry of one or other of the lively trio.

“I do not think I shall be ever able to make the man with the bow and arrow, Costanza,” exclaimed the eldest boy, Roger.

“Well, 'Uggiero,” replied the little girl in broken words, “the picture will do quite as well without him. I don't like to have the poor animals killed.”

“Papa,” said Ruggiero, suddenly rising from the floor, and running to his father, while his fine open eyes sparkled with eagerness, and he shook the hair back from his white forehead, “papa, do tell me what is the pleasure of going a-hunting?”

“I am sure I do not know, my boy,” answered the king, yawning. “It is much less trouble to stay at home.”

“What! do you not like riding on horse-back, and going to the wars, and conquering every body?” asked the eager child.

“Not unless they are very troublesome and lack punishment,” replied the king.

“But why cannot people be happy and quiet, and do as they ought?” asked the younger boy.

“For my part, I should not like being obliged to conquer them, and to burn their eyes out and hang them,” added Ruggiero.

“Nonsense, brats!” said the king. “Go back to your mosaics. If my father and grandfather had not made war, you would now be shivering with cold in some miserable country castle of Normandy.”

“But, papa,” said Roger, again darting forwards, “they made war on the pagans, and that was very right, you know; was it not Theresa?” he added, turning to the old favourite of the children.

“By the bye, Theresa,” languidly exclaimed the king, “what do people say of the executions of yesterday?”

The young female rose from the low stool where she knelt at the side of the

queen, and advancing, with lowly reverence said: "I fear they complain, my lord; and many, I am told, are sorry that the kinsman of the archbishop should have been done to death with so much indignity."

"Giorgio Majone would have it so," said the king, heedlessly. "I cannot think what made him so eager for it; and it matters not. Bid some one, Theresa, bring me a jug of mulled wine."

The young lady hastened out of the room to do the bidding.

A few moments after she had left, the king sprang suddenly to his feet, surprise, reverence, and terror, depicted on his heavy countenance. As he lay on the couch, his face had been turned towards the door; he was, therefore, the first to observe the entrance of a new comer. This was a tall monk, dressed in the long, flowing, ample, woollen robe of the Cistercian order: his head was unusually large; his eyes intelligent, but with somewhat of a wild

brightness about them. He bore in his hand a large volume of the Holy Scriptures,—his constant companion.

“So,” he exclaimed, “so ; as the hills were to be made low, and the rough ways plain, for the coming of the Christ, so do guards, and slaves, and eunuchs, disappear before the face of His prophet. None dare delay him who comes on the mission of the Lord.”

“Holy abbot Giovacchino,” said the king, “what dread announcement do you bring us?”

“Calm yourself, calm yourself, my lord,” said the queen in an undertone, as she drew near to the side of her husband ; and the three children (startled, not by the entrance of the reputed prophet, but by the unusual manner of their father), clung around her dress, so as much to impede her steps. Moving across the room, she in some sort dragged them along with her. At the door, she met Theresa returning, and gently bade her send

some one for the high admiral. "Let them tell him he must come forthwith."

"Madama," cried the monk, "take not the children away. Oh, king, king, what misfortunes hang over thee."

"Over me?" exclaimed the sovereign, terrified. "What have I done to provoke the wrath of heaven?"

"Cruelty; injustice; murder;" replied the abbot, solemnly. "And here," he added, laying his hand on the fair hair of little Ruggiero, "here stands the avenger."

"My son against me?" muttered the king, setting his teeth close, while a fiendish expression of the violence of his passions came over his face.

"Thy son against thee," answered the monk, slowly. "Not from any ill-will of his own, poor child: he is as good a child as ever lived, and long and happily will he reign: but so the justice of heaven will have it. Canst thou not read, oh king?"

"Not right-clerkly, I own; it is not the

wont of knights to meddle with your calling, sir priest," replied the king. "But still I can make out something of letters."

"I speak not of them," replied the monk, scornfully; "the gauds of pedants and idlers! Although I myself have written more books than any man now living, they were on matters above thy comprehension, and I spoke not to thee of them; but canst thou not read the wide book which nature spreads out, and on which multitudes of men record unmistakable signs as the days fleet by? Canst thou not read the hearts of men?—thy father read them well."

"What mean you, abbate?" asked the king, more boldly; and, with a show of rising anger, he added: "If that boy dare harbour in his heart one thought against my rights....."

"Wrong not the innocent child," replied Padre Giovacchino; "his heart is good and dutiful, but it is true and humane. He is but a tool in the hands of heaven. Take

my warning, and he is an useless, an unneeded tool: disregard it, and the child David was not more the avenger of the Lord than he will become."

He gave his blessing affectionately to the child, and stalked slowly forth by the door at which he had entered.

Such was the famous Calabrian abbot of Curacio, whose prophecies, at this time, disturbed Europe, as they alarmed the royal family of Sicily. Though his doctrines were afterwards condemned in the council of Lateran, he was not denied the fame of a clever writer; and Dante does not even scruple to admit him into his paradise as a true prophet:

"Raban è quivi, e lucemi da lato

Il Calabrese Abate Giovacchino,

Di spirito profetico dotato."—*Dante*, Parad. Cant. 12.

He could scarcely have left the palace, when the archbishop and the lord high admiral entered it, and were hastily and eagerly ushered into the presence of the irritated sovereign.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Gentle friends,
Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully ;
Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
Not hew him as a carcase fit for hounds :
And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,
Stir up their servants to an act of rage,
And after seem to chide them.”—*Julius Cæsar*.

It may well be supposed that King William the Bad was not in the best humour possible when the archbishop and the high admiral entered the room. The prophecy of the monk, Giovacchino, had aroused his two passions, jealousy and the desire for vengeance : and these two passions—the only two which he possessed, and even they awoke but by fits and starts—these two passions were now directed against his child, little Ruggiero. The astonishing abilities and amiable temper of the boy, had long

predisposed his father against him: for he could not help secretly contrasting these qualities with those which he felt within himself. When, therefore, Giovacchino foretold that the son should be an instrument, in the hands of heaven, to punish the father and redress the wrongs of his people, jealousy of the poor unconscious child and a resolution to revenge on him the threats of the supposed prophet, had aroused his slothful mind to its fiercest pitch of cruelty.

But, at the sight of the high admiral, he instantly calmed down; like a petulant child who runs, from those who have affronted it, to the arms of a favourite nurse.

“Oh, caro Giorgio, thou art come at last!” he exclaimed, extending both arms to embrace the bulky favourite. “I have much needed thy counsel, against—against—Get out of the room, brats!” he cried, interrupting himself, and turning fiercely to the children.

They started trembling from their play;

and, huddling round Theresa, began to drag her to the door: all but the little baby-aunt, Constanza, who tarried awhile to gather some of the mosaics from the floor into her lap: but Queen Margaret took her, rather roughly, by the hand; and with a scarcely perceptible smile and shrug of the shoulders, which were seen, and intended to be seen by no one but the admiral, she dragged her after the others; and they all left the royal presence.

“ Well, dear Giorgio; but how art thou now?” resumed the king. “ Right glad was I that thou didst not come to me last night: for it might have harmed thee after thy worry for thy daughter. By the holy face of Lucca, but these banditti shall be looked after!”

“ Nay, your grace,” interposed the archbishop, anxious to check inquiry into the engagements of his confederate during the preceding evening: “ nay, your grace, they are but small evils when mightier cares dis-

turb you and the kingdom. What had the mountebank, Giovacchino, said or done to move your lordship?"

"The mountebank?" repeated the sovereign complacently. "Holy archbishop, do you really believe that he is no true prophet?"

"He!" exclaimed Majone, who prudently wished to know what had been prophecied before the truth of the prophet was vouched for or condemned; "he a prophet! And what is it, I pray you, he threatens now?"

"The anger of heaven upon what he calls my cruelties:—though thou knowest, Giorgio, they are mostly thine own: I do but quell the rebellious barons when thou hast aroused their insolence. Nay, never fear, man," he added, as the quick eye of sympathy perceived a shrinking in the glance of the admiral: "never fear. I am faithful to my friends; and never cry 'Haro!' upon those who serve me: least of all upon thee. But the crazy monk—I hope he is crazy,

sir archbishop—prophecied as I have told you; and then declared that the boy, Ruggiero, should supplant me from my father's throne. I wish I may see the presumptuous imp wag a finger against my rights!"

Hugo of Palermo saw it was high time to throw discredit upon the prophecies of Giovacchino, lest they should lead the king to suspect the new alliance formed the night before.

"If the prophecies of the crazy monk, as your grace rightly calls him," he said, "be all that disturb you, be appeased at once. Why, my lord, he is a heretic. Some of his innumerable books teach doctrines opposed to those of the holy church. I pledge my word that they are heretical; and a misbeliever, as we all know, can never be so favoured by heaven as to be endowed with the gift of prophecy. He is a mountebank."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the king drawing a long breath: "but I will look after

Master Ruggiero, notwithstanding," he added in a threatening tone.

What an amiable trio now engage our attentions! And yet we hardly know whether to condemn or to pity them most. Deluding and deluded, and yet influenced by some honest purposes while embarking in a course of events justified by the manners and the habits of the times—how differently would they all have acted under a different system of society—a system which should have subjected each one, prince and subject, to the action of fixed and certain laws! Rebellion and conspiracy were not then the crimes that they have since become: for redress was not then to be had legally; and public opinion upheld the aggrieved who sought that redress by violent means which all knew could not be otherwise obtained. He who sets himself above all law, must not complain if those whom he wrongs fall back upon the law of nature; which bids them right themselves as they

best may. We bespeak such reflections in excuse of the archbishop and of Matteo of Taverna. Those who like to excuse the king, on the ground that he was deceived by the admiral, are welcome to do so. We fear that we can suggest no excuse for the admiral himself.

However, the time was now come for them to begin to act upon the resolutions formed in the Torre di Baych on the preceding evening: and Majone led the way with his wonted appearance of candour.

“Let us think no more,” he said, “of the mad abbot Giovacchino. If he becomes troublesome with his prophecies, we must either hang him or give him a richer monastery. Either way will, I doubt not, silence him equally well. But I grieve, my lord, to say that I have advices of worse evils than any he can bring upon your grace. The barons of Puglia are again in revolt.”

“Burn their castles, and hang them to

the flaming rafters," said the king languidly.

"But I fear me it may not be so easy to overcome them," continued the admiral, "while they are countenanced by those so near your person."

"Whom mean you, Giorgio? By the holy face of Lucca, speak out!"

"I will speak out, my lord; I will speak out," replied the admiral carelessly. "No secrets or double meanings or whisperings for me! Your cousin the Count of Basseville, and Eberard, Count of Squillace, have both lately passed over to Italy; and I doubt not that it is they who have told these fiery barons that your grace is dead."

"Dead!" cried the king, grinding his teeth. "What mean they?"

"Indeed, my lord," said the archbishop, "it is so long since you have left the palace walls and shown yourself to the people, that we cannot be surprised that the disappointed multitude should have adopted a supposi-

tion which is fortunately so far from the truth."

"As they shall find, in due time," muttered the sovereign. "And," he added bitterly, "and I take it for certain that these dutiful barons of mine have sworn fealty to their darling, Ruggiero, in my place?"

"Think no more of Giovacchino, my lord," expostulated Majone: "but rather direct me how to act with Robert of Basseville and his fellow-conspirator, Eberard."

"How to act by them, Giorgio," answered the king. "Thou art mighty scrupulous this morning! Get them into the prisons below, by any means thy wit and that of the good archbishop can devise: and do not plague me again about them until they are safely lodged in irons. Now; shall we have a cup of mulled wine?"

"And the other?" interposed Hugo, with some diffidence.

"What other?" asked the king impatiently; throwing himself, at full length,

upon the low couch ; and, with the toe of his slipper, pushing about the mosaic playthings which the children had left on the floor.

“ Did not the lord admiral name him ? ” suggested the archbishop : “ The Count Simon ”—

“ Ha ! what of him ? ” cried William, rising on one elbow and gazing intently in the faces of his counsellors. “ Will the bastard never forget that I took from him the principality of Taranto, which my father had no business to have given him ? ”

“ Exchange is no robbery,” said Majone cheerfully. “ Your grace made him Count of Policastro instead. Ha ! ha ! ha ! ” and he shook his fat sides with laughter.

The king also laughed. When their merriment had somewhat abated, Majone easily convinced the jealous sovereign that his devoted brother was plotting against his authority, By charging him with having fomented some disturbances which had

broken out amongst the soldiers at Capua, —and which, in fact, he had much striven to appease,—he obtained an order to recall him immediately to Palermo.

Thus far, all went on well, according to the schemes of the conspirators ; for unpopular as the king already was amongst his barons, it was necessary to make him more so before the crowning, or rather the dethroning, blow, could be struck. This could not be more surely brought about, than by disgracing those who were most looked up to by their compeers ; and who, at the same time, were personally and loyally attached to the prince. And yet it was strange that, with all his acuteness, Majone should not have discovered that he himself was the prime object of aversion to the insulted nobility ; that they looked upon the king as a mere tool in the hands of a low-born and unscrupulous man, who governed the country for his own advantage, and, as they firmly believed, with a view to supplant his

sovereign on the throne. Numerous as were the agents whom the admiral had spread over the land, to bring him the earliest information of every movement and of every feeling on the part of the enemy—for such the loyal nobility were esteemed by him—they told him not of his own increasing unpopularity, but left him to think that all the successive outbursts of partial rebellion were directed solely against the sovereign rather than against the modern Sejanus himself.

But from whatever cause it originated, that dissatisfaction, he felt, must be appeased for the present; the king must show himself, and so silence the rumours which averred him to lie dead in the palace. For more than a month, he had not moved from the private apartments, unless it were that at times he would hang listlessly over the balcony round the inner court-yard, and watch the masons busied in raising the new tower, for he had some taste in architecture.

The nobles, who had often craved audiences, had been rudely repulsed. He had seen, he had spoken to no one except Majone and the archbishop, who had been incessantly closeted with him, and had instilled into him their own views of passing events. Sloth had grown upon him by indulgence ; and never had the admiral experienced so much difficulty in bending him to his will, as he now found when he urged him to go forth from the palace. At length, overcome by importunities, he offered to be borne in a litter to the cathedral, and to show himself there during a public service. But even this would not suit the inexorable Majone.

“ If not dead, they will still say that you are dying, if your grace does not show more life. A litter, per Bacco ! Why every high-born dame is proud to mount her charger, and interlards her discourse with terms of horsemanship. A litter and high mass will never do ! ”

“ What the devil wouldst thou have ? ”

expostulated the sovereign, yawning. "Must I have lists raised in the square of the Cassaro, bury myself in a quilted gambaisson, and run bouts with every saucy knight who may choose to splinter a lance against my shield? I would rather be dead at once, than take so much trouble to show that I am alive."

"No, no, caro monsignore," replied Majone. "I am not so unreasonable as to ask you to don armour for any less cause than to quell serious rebellion; and then you will own that the pleasure of overcoming the rebels, of punishing their audacity, and of confiscating their lands, is some compensation for the trouble."

"Well?" muttered the king, while a twinkle in his pale blue eye, and a downward curl of the corners of his large mouth, showed that he was gratified by the flattery and the recollections it awakened.

"Well, then," continued the admiral, "as there is as yet no such cause for exer-

tion, I do not ask you to undergo it. I would only suggest that you should let it be known that you will hunt to-morrow in the forest of Monte Pellegrino. It is so near the town, that thousands will gather to testify to your strength and health. And the sport is one which all Norman princes dearly love."

"Seccatura!—it is a bore," petulantly replied the monarch.

"And yet no sovereign more strictly guards the rights of the chase, nor more rigorously punishes any infringement of them," remonstrated the archbishop.

"As a point of honour, sir archbishop," said the king; "as I would punish any one who should place my crown on his head, although I may not myself wish to wear at all times the cumbrous bauble."

The conversation here became more desultory; and during a conference of some hours, in which all things, great and small, were talked of and discussed and coloured

according to the fancy of the favourite, it was finally determined that the king should make an effort to leave his pillow on the following morning, as soon as possible after the break of day ; and should prove to his loving subjects that he was in such robust health, as to be able to “ enjoy ” the sports of the chase.

CHAPTER V.

How sweet to ride at early morn
O'er hill and wooded glen !
How sweet to hear the bugle horn
Wake up our merry men !
See they gather : see they meet :
E'en the very earth smells sweet !
See the curling dews uprise,
Like a morning sacrifice,
Steaming up to bless the skies.

How beautiful is sunrise in summer!—
enjoyed, admired and described by none so
much as by those who seldom leave their
pillows till two or three hours before mid-
day. Are we amongst the number? We
decline to plead ; and leave the reader to
form his own judgment.

What a freshness was in the morning air,
as it dashed against the heated cheeks of
the king, like cold water placed to parched
lips ! A slight steam uprose from the

wooded vales and the heathery hills, and curled, in graceful eddies, through the slanting purple rays of the glorious sun. Every leaf was tipped with dew,—every flower was spangled with its glittering drop. There was a fragrance in the upturned earth itself, which blended gratefully with the many sweets of the odoriferous shrubs around.

But the upturned earth and the cultivated fields were soon left behind, and the royal cavalcade passed over the gently-rising plain around Palermo, and approached the woods which covered the ground where Monreale now stands. Much nearer to the city than that splendid church, the royal chase then extended ; and all the outskirts of the copse were alive with the population that had hurried out on the joyful occasion. It is true that the royal party itself consisted of few besides Majone, the archbishop (for the clergy hunted in the much-bepraised middle ages), the Baron of Taverna, and

little Ruggiero, whom the conspirators had caused to be mounted, in order to show him also to the people. But then the whole country swarmed with riders, and with persons on foot of every class and age and nation ; native Sicilians, Saracens, Greeks, and Normans, all jostled together in their well-contrasting attire of many colours and shapes. Hundreds of beaters and huntsmen, in the royal liveries, lined every avenue, and prepared to turn the game at the outskirts of the forest. Dogs leapt up, and tumbled head over heels, in their eagerness at being at length released from the kennel. The huntsman's horn wound cheerily under the leafy covers ; and all animate and inanimate nature (if such exists) seemed wide awake, and full of life and health.

Not so, however, the king himself. Alert as he was in the battle-field, when his passions urged him on, he now went forth for what seemed to him no adequate motive for all the trouble he took ; and frequent

yawns, as he sat heavily in his high-peaked saddle, testified how much rather he would still have slumbered under the silken hangings of his darkened bed-chamber. Different far was the aspect of little Ruggiero, who, on a small well-trained palfrey, caracolled now before, now behind, and now at the side of his moody father. A quiver of arrows and a small bow, which he had already been taught to use with some skill, hung at his back; and he whooped with delight whenever they turned into a fresh glade, or the huntsman's horn gave token of the progress of the chase.

The present object of the hunters was professedly the wild boar; and each one, except the child, was therefore armed with a strong short spear. Little Roger's strength was still unequal to such a weapon. Those were not the days when beaters gradually hemmed in the game, and drove them, like herds of black swine, down avenues at the side of which the sovereign might stand

armed with a ready-loaded rifle ; while every courtier should be placed below, in the order of his favour, to shoot at that which should have escaped the king and those next to him. Such a style of sport suits the languid habits of the present sovereigns of Naples, and might indeed have suited the slothful propensities of William the Bad ; but the spirit of Normans would have scorned such uninteresting butchery. Mounted on his good steed, and brandishing his steel-tipped spear in hand, each knight was expected to ride after his prey ; and, when the dogs had brought it to a stand, to leap from his saddle and boldly meet it face to face and foot to foot.

And now, for some while, the king and his party had followed what seemed to be the forefather of all the wild boars in the forest ; so unwieldy was its size, so stubborn were its bristles, and so threatening were the jagged tusks that stood out on each side of its foaming and froth-covered mouth.

The king had, at length entered thoroughly into the spirit of the chase, and with slackened bridle galloped after the eager dogs. Little Roger came up, at some little distance, behind; and beside him rode the archbishop, careful that he should not come to harm. Majone and Taverna were too good courtiers to interfere with the royal sport; or, perhaps, had pursuits of their own elsewhere. The boar scudded ahead, the dogs gained upon him, the king went thundering on. It was evident that the chase could not last much longer. The heavy brute was well-nigh spent. At length he reeled,—rose again,—and finding that he could not outspeed his pursuers, turned staggering at bay. Instantly the king leapt from his horse. It stood in the place, well trained to await the issue. “Call off the dogs!” roared the sovereign to the attendants near; and then placing his ashen spear against his thigh, he advanced boldly to the panting monster. Nor did the boar seem

to dread the encounter. His tongue hung out; thick white froth covered his tusks, and besprinkled his shaggy breast; but his small red eyes glared fiercely upon his enemy, and he was evidently prepared to spring upon him, and to bear him down by his huge weight.

The eye of the king glared no less than that of the brute. The spirit of a Norman huntsman was awake within him; and warily he advanced towards his foe, prepared to thrust his iron spear down that open throat, when the boar should make the fatal spring. It was a trial of some difficulty. If his hand swerved, or if from any cause he missed his aim, the boar would have the best of it: the contest would be body to body; and the short dagger in his belt would then be the sovereign's only protection. He trembled with eagerness for the conflict; for when roused, no one was braver than King William. At this moment little Roger came galloping up behind. He, too, was as excited as his father. He

knew nought of the rules of venery: there was the boar he had followed so long; the object of every one, he thought, was to kill it; he pulled up his palfrey beside his father, unslung his bow, and carefully fixed an arrow to the string. The boar had now measured the distance: and, with his hind legs drawn under him, was about to make the fatal spring at the king's spear. An arrow whizzed from the bow of the child, and, more by chance than by skill, fixed itself in the left eye of the monster. It reeled over, and staggered with fatigue and agony. But if the eye of the king had before matched the glare of the wild boar, to what can we liken the flash of anger that now came over him? Foaming with rage, mad with vexation and passion, at having been baulked of his sport, he turned eagerly upon the intruder, saw that it was his son, and the prophecy of the monk came across his mind, and added new bitterness to his impulses. Without any formed plan, but without a moment's hesitation, he raised his

iron spear, and, swerving round, struck furiously at the child. A movement made by the palfrey for its own preservation (for little Roger himself was too much aghast by the anger of his father to move a limb), a movement of the palfrey alone saved the child. The spear missed him, only slightly touching his thigh ; and the iron point imbedded itself in the inside of the animal's hock. It started off with the pain, and the boy was jerked out of the saddle to the heather.

At this moment, the archbishop rode up ; and anxiously calling out, " For heaven's sake, my lord—" leaped from his own horse, and raised the innocent child. The king did not attempt to renew the blow ; he stepped back, without casting a second glance at his son ; and mounting his horse, rode slowly on in the forest. The child was only stunned by the fall ; and soon came to, in the arms of the archbishop, who then placed him on his own saddle before him, and thoughtfully rode back to Palermo.

CHAPTER VI.

“What ! keep a week away ? seven days and nights ?
Eight score eight hours ? And lovers’ absent hours,
More tedious than the dial eight score times !
O weary reckoning.”—*Othello*.

WE have said that the Baron of Taverna did not follow close upon the king, being too good a courtier to interfere with the royal chase, or having, haply, pursuits of his own more attractive than that of the wild boar. Such, indeed, was the case. He had been presented to the sovereign in the morning by the high admiral ; and as the future son-in-law of the favourite, had been greeted with more civility than King William usually showed to his nobility. But when the cavalcade scattered under the boughs of the forest, and huntsmen and dogs gave note of more busy preparation for the

morning's sport, Don Matteo had gradually dropt behind the royal cavalcade ; and giving way to sweet and bitter thoughts, had soon forgotten the busy scene in which he was supposed to be an actor. Then again, aroused by the burst which told that the game was found, he had peevishly turned his horse's head up a retired alley on the left hand, and had rode smartly over the brow of a hill which separated the scene of the noisy chase from the adjoining valley.

Here, again, he soon relapsed into the train of thoughts which had, more or less, weighed upon him during the last six-and-thirty hours. He had made his choice ; his dream of life was over ; he had been presented to the king as the future son of Majone ; publicly presented, amid the demonstrative congratulations of the courtiers, which could not hide from his suspicious mind many a suppressed smile or fancied disparaging allusion to the mean origin of his adopted father-in-law. Giorgio Majone,

the peasant's, the Italian peasant's son, was to mingle his race with that of the proud Norman conqueror. He had sold himself. There was no denying,—there was no palliating the fact. He had sold himself. And for what? Had it been for a woman whom he really loved, his passion might have coloured the debasement. Had it been for a woman eminent for beauty, virtue, mental qualifications, wealth or high birth, his own compeers might have admitted the plea, might have owned its wisdom, might perchance have envied him. But to have sold himself for a Corazza,—the vulgar, forward child of the son of the oil-seller,—this was, indeed, degradation. Self-love sought, in vain, for some admissible excuse.

Aye, but that oil-seller was the king's all-powerful favourite: through him, was his only road to fame, to power,—to safety, even, against the claims of Abderachman on his property, and the supposed hostility of the sovereign. Was this an excuse for

self-degradation? Would his fathers, who had conquered this fairest portion of the garden of the earth, have bowed to such motives? They, too, had been ambitious of fame, of wealth, of power; and they had achieved what they had sought: but they had not done so by self-abasement; they had not done so by bartering away their liberty to those in every way their inferiors; they had not done so by sacrificing the affections of their hearts to low-born women, incapable of sympathising with their heroic aspirations. Far different had been the example they had set him. The wife of the great Robert Guiscard had partaken all his privations, and had fought in all his wars, at the side of her husband. Eremburga, the wife of the first conqueror and king of Sicily,—the wife of his own grandfather's brother-in-arms,—had shared her husband's military cloak at the siege of Palermo,—had rode beside him in the thickest of the battle,—had aided him by her lance

no less than by her noble spirit and counsel. Such had been the wives of the heroes from whom he boasted his descent; and should he, their offspring, sell his heart to a Corazza!—

He put spurs to his horse, galloped furiously through the neighbouring valley, and clattered into the courtyard of the castle of Beni-zekher.

Rapid, however, as had been the course of his fate during the last thirty-six hours, the fame of his engagement with the Lady Corazza had, by some means, preceded him; and the old chamberlain hesitated, with a look of ill-concealed amazement, ere he answered the baron's hurried enquiry for the Countess Clemence. At length, with solemn courtesy, he led the way to the little octangular room in which we first saw our heroine, and here left him, while he went to announce his arrival to the lady.

Don Matteo thanked his stars when he found the apartment unoccupied by its usual

lovely tenant. A few minutes would give him time to collect his scattered thoughts. To collect his thoughts? And for what purpose? What was he now about to do? Had he really resolved to break through his engagement with Majone? He paced the room with furious strides. How small it was! He could do nothing but turn and return; no space to walk and ponder leisurely. He wondered why she did not come. He would not think at all. He would leave it all to chance. Leave it to chance? What! his own honour,—the happiness of his life? How close the little room became! He tried to draw up the blinds, and to open the small casements. His hands shook so that he bungled, and could not do it without making a clattering with the iron shutter-bars that startled him. He listened. Not a sound was heard. Would she never come?

But, again, what did he intend to do when she did come? Should he throw himself

at her feet, confess his momentary weakness, and pray her to show him that preference she had never yet avowed? And so draw down the vengeance of the high admiral, in addition to the machinations of Abderachman and the disfavour of the king? He started from the couch on which he had seated himself, and again paced up and down that little room. His head grew dizzy with the quick and frequent turns. Would she never come? He must have been there at least half-an-hour, which seemed to him four times as long a period. He struck his forehead, as much in vexation at the little counsel it gave him, as in the hope of calming its throbbings. He listened. What was that low booming noise? It must be so: it was the throbbing of his own heart, beating audibly against his ribs! He laid his hand upon it, and tried to still, by pressure, a violence that was really painful. His lips were parched. His tongue clove to the sides of

his mouth. Some buds of jasmine stood on the table, in a vase of water; they had stood there when he had last visited that room, and were now withered, and the water had turned yellow. He raised it with a trembling hand, and drank it eagerly off. How refreshing it was.

Another half-hour has passed. She must be purposely keeping him in the agony of suspense. How will she receive him, when she does come? Her high spirit will most likely spurn his faithless suit. Spurn him? Shall he expose himself to be spurned, to be scorned, by any woman living? And yet he scorns himself; and wherefore should not she scorn him? But yet how foolish not to resolve upon what is to be his own line of conduct, when she does come? Here has he waited two good hours. Who could the strange creature in the wood be, she who warned him against uniting himself with the countess, and told him that Corazza was the bride appointed to him by heaven?

How he wished he could see her again, and crave her motives, and take counsel with her!

Ha!—that light and silvery laugh! Who could mistake the sweet voice of Clemence, who had once heard it? She was not, then, so far off. He had begun to think that she was absent from the castle. But could she be so light-hearted, when she might surely guess how much he suffered? and when she knew (for his heart assured him that she did know) of his engagement to Corazza? Most likely she would spurn him, if he sought to renew his suit.

Hark!—the huntsman's horn coming up from the scene of the royal chase in the forest below. There he might now be,—there he ought now to be,—the associate of the most powerful man in the kingdom, the brother-conspirator who was pledged to overturn a throne. What a labyrinth of difficulties of every kind he had involved himself in! Oh, for some one to give him

counsel, and direct his wavering heart ! How readily would the strong mind of Clemence have done this ! He was resolved. He would not give up such a woman, such a noble companion in life, for the trifling, mean-spirited Corazza. He would throw himself at her feet ; he would tell her every thing ; he would own how he had been led on, and how he had been tempted to sacrifice the love of years, to a base worldly policy : he would confess every thing, and secure her forgiveness. Let him but obtain that and her favour, and he would defy Majone, Abderachman, the king, and the whole world.

She comes. He hears her merry talk along the passage, as she caresses a favourite wolf-dog. He hears the rustle of her stiff brocaded dress at the door of the room. With a look of resolute enthusiasm, he awaits its opening. In another moment he will be at her feet.

“ Dear Matteo ! ” exclaimed the countess ;

cheerily entering the room, and extending a hand to him with a kind, frank manner, which he saw at once to be forced, and which she had never shown him before; “dear Matteo, pardon me that I have kept you waiting a few minutes. But poor Mustafa here,” patting the shaggy head of her dog, “poor Mustafa had a thorn in his foot, and I could not leave him until I had seen it safely taken out. It was so small, that they had some difficulty in finding it; but it is all right now, is it not, Mustafa?” she added, taking his two ears in her little white hands, and shaking his head good-naturedly between them.

“Oh, bah!” she continued, “how dirty they are! Where have you been rolling, signor Mustafa?”

She took a golden flagree flask of perfume from a table, and poured it profusely over her hands.

It may well be supposed that Taverna was taken aback by this unexpected and

unnaturally-cheerful greeting. Instead of falling at her feet, and protesting all the vows his heart was bursting with, he stood silently before her, and watched, like a stupid spectator, the forced by-play between her and her dog.

“Do you know, Don Matteo,” continued the lady, “that Mustafa has been so unhappy all this morning! He heard the horns of the huntsmen in the forest below, and has been whining and leaping about, eager to join in the chase that is going on. But I take too good care of the old fellow to allow that. Brother William were not very unlikely to send an arrow through his honest heart, were he to see a strange wolf dog in his royal chase.”

“Is he so severe?” awkwardly stammered the baron, forcing himself to say something.

“Good sooth, that he is,” replied the countess. “You know all we Normans are a proud race, and like to preserve our game, like our honour, from being tampered with.

Now the Italians and Sicilians do not enter into all these feelings. I take it for granted that they have a principle of honour of their own, though we, of a bolder stock, do not always discover it. But, holy Mary," she cried, checking herself, "forgive me, caro Matteo; I forgot that you are half an Italian yourself. Your poor mother was a Sicilian."

"A Greek, madama," replied Taverna, somewhat surlily, as he felt that her speech against the Italians was prompted by the knowledge of his engagement to the daughter of Majone.

"A Greek; true," observed the countess. Then, anxious, apparently, to keep the conversation from flagging, and still more anxious to evince her own thoughtless light-heartedness, she ran on in the same unnatural tone: "Do you know what a dreadful thing has just happened in the forest? The king has struck at little Rug-giero, because the child marred his sport,

and has nearly killed him. Were not you there? You seem to be attired in hunting guise."

"I left the cavalcade early, to come up to see your ladyship; I—I—"

"A thousand thanks for your kind preference!" exclaimed the countess, interrupting what she feared might be the stammered commencement of more serious talk. "A thousand thanks for your kind preference," she repeated, somewhat bitterly. "You were always kind and considerate to me. And now, perhaps, you are going to escort me to La Cuba? There is a reunion there this morning of some of the prettiest and noblest of the ladies of Palermo. You ought to come, if you are invited; for I understand that none but choice spirits are admitted. We are to have excellent music, and are to practise some new dances; and I doubt not we shall be so gay! Do come."

"I have not the advantage to be one of the invited," replied Taverna, "nor would

my feelings suit so happy a meeting. I will not delay you, lady, from the pleasures for which your lightness of heart so well qualifies you. May you be ever as happy as you now are."

"Thanks, thanks, dear Don Matteo," answered the countess, holding out her hand to the departing baron. He, however, would not trust himself to touch it; but hastily, and somewhat abruptly, left the room.

When the door was closed, Clemence raised her two open hands, and pressed them both over her eyes and forehead. For a minute, she stood like a statue on the same spot in the centre of the apartment; for a minute, she pressed them harder and harder upon her flushed face. The effort she had made was too much for her; and she fell heavily upon the floor in a swoon.

CHAPTER VII.

“ A tygress robb'd of young, a lioness
Or any interesting beast of prey,
Are similes at hand for the distress
Of ladies who cannot have their own way.”

Byron.

A FORTNIGHT had passed away in anxiety or unhappiness to all the principal personages we have mentioned, except to the king himself. He, buried in sloth and indolence, heeded not the progress of events in which he was so deeply interested, nor stirred beyond the walls of his palace to gain that insight into the feeling of the people which sovereigns, of the age of which we write, were wont to obtain by personal enquiry and investigation. The unusual effort he had made to show himself in the hunt in the woods of Monte Pellegrino, had termi-

nated in a movement of anger of which he felt sulkily ashamed ; and he was now more than ever disinclined to meet the gaze of his people and barons, or to hear of the progress of the common weal or common woe through any other channels than those which the policy of the high admiral and the archbishop opened to him.

A fortnight had passed away ; and Palermo was in an uproar. The shops were shut. The doors were barricaded. All the male inhabitants of the town were congregated in groups or paraded the streets in idle but threatening guise. Every man bore on his person as many arms, offensive and defensive, as he could well encumber himself with ; and, in those days, all were accustomed to carry weights under which their enervated predecessors and successors would have fainted. The interposition of the quarter of the Saracens alone prevented the rioters from proceeding to the greatest extremities. We have explained that this

division of the town occupied the middle of the tongue of land on which Palermo then stood—separating the extreme point on which rose the Torre di Baych from the upper third of the city occupied by the royal palace. The Saracens took no part in the present affray. Although armed, they stood within their own quarters: and their neutrality separating the two bodies of the excited inhabitants, prevented them, in some degree, from acting with earnestness and decision. They, the Saracens, cared not for any quarrels that might occur either between the king and his Norman vassals or between the king and the native Sicilians: the one party was that of their conquerors, the others had been their slaves: and little cause had they to interfere in favour either of the one or the other.

Nevertheless the riot had now lasted two days, and had increased to such a pitch, that the suppression of it was absolutely necessary either by fair words or by force.

The Lord Admiral, Majone, sat in his study in the Torre di Baych : piles of papers and letters were on the table before him. He was leaning over it, and studying a large map of the south of Italy that also encumbered the board. His face was more than usually thoughtful ; and the cheerful expression it ever wore in the presence of another, had given place to one of anxiety. His daughter, Corazza, entered, and walked to a recess in the window. Her father saw her but did not rise from the map or speak to her. For a few moments, the worthy daughter of the intriguer stood silent against the marble pier : then heavy sighs broke from her labouring chest. Still the father took no notice, further than to clear up the frown of anxiety that had gathered upon his brow and to restore his usual frank expression. As the sighs availed not to draw his attention, they grew in intensity ; loud and more loud, they burst from her and assumed a convulsive violence that quickly

ended in sobs and inarticulate screams that shook her whole body.

“Nonsense, Corazza, nonsense!” exclaimed the admiral at length. “It boots not to labour so hard when we are all alone. What wouldst thou?”

The sobs and tears now came forth faster than ever.

“It is good practice,” said her father coolly: “but I am busy now and cannot wait. So if thou wilt not speak out like a rational being, I must go back to my papers.”

He moved again towards the table; but she caught his hand and stayed him.

“He has never been here,” she said, “since that first day.”

“I know it, carina: what then?” asked the admiral. “What then? What wouldst thou?”

“Kill him!” cried the daughter with a look of most intense malice, and stamping her foot on the floor.

“ Kill him !” repeated her father: “ nay, methinks that would not be the way to bring him to thy feet. His dead body would profit thee little.”

“ It would keep him from that haughty old countess, at all events !” cried the little vixen in tones of savage jealousy.

“ Ho ! ho ! so thou hast heard of his visit to Beni-zekher.”

“ It has been just told me: did not you know of it, father ?” asked Corazza eagerly.

“ Dost think I take so little heed of myself and of the kingdom ?” asked the admiral exultingly. “ I knew of it on the very day on which the visit was paid. But calm thyself; he has not repeated it. He has been living quietly at his castle of Taverna; and the old countess as thou callest her—though, by heaven ! she is one of the prettiest dames of Sicily—has received no one since. He cannot have gained much by his visit, since it has not been repeated.”

“ But it may be,” insisted Corazza. “ While

they are both alive and free, nothing can be depended on."

"Fear not, child: there breathes not the man who would dare to slight our alliance: and I place undoubting confidence in the fears of thy betrothed, if not in his love. However, I am about to remove him from that thou deemest a trial of his constancy."

"But she, she, father: she may follow him?" cried the little jealous maiden.

"That, too, shall be cared for. Go thy ways, Corazza: thou art a clever child; but thou canst not teach thy father."

He patted her cheek affectionately, and gave her a push towards the door, as the chamberlain, Adinolfo, ushered in the new jailor, Gavaretto.

"Well, friend," said the lord admiral, turning good-humouredly towards his new protégé, "how dost thou fare with the four-score pets under thy charge? But thou must resign one or two of them, Gavaretto; and that by the way which, as a good jailor,

ought to be most distasteful to thee—alive and unmutilated. The Count Simon of Policastro must go forth.”

“At your lordship’s pleasure,” muttered the jailor.

“Nay, it is no pleasure of mine,” replied the admiral: “but these disturbances must be appeased by some means. And if the rabble of the town will not allow us to keep their favourite out of harm’s way, we must e’en give him the opportunity of rushing into it, and of meeting worse than he now has. Here is a written order for his discharge: and tell him that I advise him, as a friend, to go quietly to one of his estates in Sicily.”

Gavaretto silently took the parchment and was leaving the room, when Majone called him back.

“Is the Saracen robber, Abderachman, executed yet?” he asked.

“Monsignore, no; he was only taken last night.”

“But I sent an order to have him broken on the wheel, the first thing this morning. Thou must be more exact in future,” said the admiral with a frown. “However,” he continued, “thy remissness is fortunate in this case, as I have changed my mind about him. Remove him to the grated cell ; and show him the trick of the bars by which he may escape. And tell him that the lord high admiral stands his friend.”

“My throat once felt the edge of his scimitar,” muttered Gavaretto sulkily.

“And thou wouldst be revenged on him, I warrant me,” said Majone laughing. “Why, pazzo che sei, thou art revenged while he lives to see thee honoured for withstanding him. Go thy ways, and let him go his ;” he added, as the jailor left the room.”

“It is quite as well,” continued Majone to himself ; “it is quite as well to keep the robber alive, as a rod over Master Matteo, who is so mightily afraid of him. Besides,

his death might displease the Saracens, whom I would have well-disposed towards me in the chances that are thickening around."

He paced the room thoughtfully till a sound of horses' hoofs was heard in the court-yard below. A few minutes after, the Baron of Taverna greeted him in a manner that would have been cordial had it not exhibited more deference than their relative positions justified. But Taverna was a bad actor, and could not disguise doubt and hesitation as completely as long practice had enabled the minister to do so.

"Caro Matteo!" he cried, hastening up to him and embracing him as warmly as if no momentary doubt of his love and devotion to his daughter had ever crossed his mind; "caro Matteo, I am delighted to see thee again. We have much grieved, Corazza and I, to hear of the unwellness that has kept thee so secluded at Taverna. But

thou art better now ; though it has told somewhat upon thy fine features."

The baron felt grateful to Majone for having furnished so good an excuse for his prolonged absence ; and glad he was that his mental anxieties had somewhat dimmed the lustre of his usual appearance. He felt more at his ease ; and conversed freely with his brother-conspirator on the progress of their plot and the tumults that disturbed the streets of Palermo.

"The fact is," said the admiral, "our arrest of Simon of Policastro and the others has not acted upon the minds either of the people or of their compeers as we had expected it would. Instead of arousing their anger against the king, it has led them to charge the whole blame upon me ; and to impute to me that I force William to offend every one with the hope of supplanting him. Now thou knowest how false are all these surmises ; as we have agreed that the boy, Ruggiero, shall replace his father on the

throne : and it seems that the king's attack on his son during the hunt has made the good archbishop more eager than ever in our designs."

Taverna expressed, and unfeignedly, his delight at hearing this : for while the archbishop was stanch, he felt that he had some one whose guidance he could follow more surely than that of the father of his betrothed.

"The truth is," resumed Majone, "the truth is that one of my agents whom I sent to the new Pope, Alexander, was led on by the wily Tuscan to betray more of our plans than he should have done. Who would have deemed that the Pope would scorn the heavy bribes offered to him ! However, the fact is so ; and his Holiness has now turned his knowledge against us, and has roused all the barons of Puglia and Calabria to rebel, under pretence of freeing their king from my thralldom. The king has written letters to them all, commanding

them to disband their followers and to submit to the orders of his most dear and devoted lord high admiral—Ha! ha! thou mayst well smile, Matteo! But I do not expect they will pay much reverence to the injunctions of his Highness: and I need to send them one of their own order in whom they will trust and in whose truth I myself can confide. No one can so well undertake this mission as thou, my dear son that soon wilt be.”

“Me!” cried the baron, with a sudden feeling of shame at appearing before all the nobility of the kingdom as the defender and future son-in-law of the upstart.

“Thou,” persisted the admiral. “They will attend to thee. Thy name and station, as one of the most powerful of their number, will have weight with them. Thou canst explain to them what an indolent yet bloody-minded brute their king is; that I can no longer temper his savage moods; thou canst suggest our plot, wherever thou canst do so

with safety. Thou canst do an infinity of good ; and canst hasten matters which, having been once determined upon, ought to be completed without delay. The change, too, will be good for thy health."

The young man thought to himself that it would, at all events, remove him from any necessity of waiting upon the hateful Co-razza—for in that light he looked upon her since his last interview with the countess : and would prevent his mind from brooding upon the difficulties of the position in which he had so inconsiderately placed himself, by taking him amongst stirring scenes and obliging him to play an active part in the most exciting affairs. He eagerly, therefore, caught at the admiral's proposal ; and expressed his willingness to set off instantly to meet the rebel barons.

" Instantly, nay ; thanks for thy zeal," replied the admiral ; " but I would not put thee to so much inconvenience : as soon as thy preparations will permit thee—"

“To-morrow, then, monsignore,” replied the baron ; “if you will give me this afternoon to make my arrangements, I shall be ready to receive your final instructions to-morrow morning ; and, ere night fall, I shall be far advanced on my road to Messina.”

Congratulating himself that, by this arrangement, he escaped an interview with his betrothed as well as a prolonged discourse with her father, upon whom no small share of the antipathy he now felt for the daughter was reflected, he extended his hand to the admiral, and the two conspirators and seeming friends took an apparently-cordial farewell of each other.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ — ‘Those happy smiles,
That played on her ripe lip seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief, sorrow
Would be a rarity most beloved, if all
Could so become it.”—*King Lear*.

ANOTHER week had slipped away, and the Baron of Taverna had escaped all the classical dangers of Scylla and Charybdis, and was proceeding on his mission *di qua del Faro*—as that part of what ought to be one of the most important states of modern Europe is now designated. The tumults in Palermo had been appeased by the release of the Count Simon of Policastro; and all was proceeding much in its usual course, save that an undefined dread, or rather presentiment of events about to hap-

pen, weighed upon the minds of even the most thoughtless Sicilians. The Countess Clemence, recovered from the swoon in which she had long lain after her last interview with Don Matteo, strove to cast from her thoughts one who had shown such fickleness of disposition as to make him unworthy the regard of a strong-minded woman. So, at least, she tried to argue with herself: while feelings which belonged to her more indissolubly than did strength of mind, pleaded still in his favour; and told her that, if he had been swayed by the threats and courtesies of an all-powerful and unscrupulous minister and by her own refusal of his suit, the thralldom had lasted but a few hours; and that the next succeeding day had again seen him at her feet would she only have accepted his homage. But no: her woman's pride had resented his courtship of power and of safety rather than of her: by an effort under which her heart had almost

broken, she had shown indifference, ignorance even of his long-tried and still enduring affection: had led him to think that she was light of heart and heedless as a sister of the feelings of his inmost soul. And, thanks be to the saints! she had been able to maintain the show of heartlessness so long as he had been before her! That was, at all events, a comfort. He had not seen her faint beneath the efforts she had made.

Such and so contradictory were the reflections and the fancies that, by turns, agitated the swelling breast of our noble-minded but tender-hearted heroine. Days passed away, and strenuously she laboured to recover that serenity of look and that peace of mind which the events of a few hours had so terribly shaken. The old castle of Beni-zekher loomed amongst the hills in its wonted sturdy pride of tower and battlement. The trees and the heather around it reflected, as gaily as ever, the

gorgeous tints of those beaming skies: the birds carolled amongst the boughs; and all nature looked as cheerful as if none were near to pine; or as if it strove to offer consolation to the mourners who would not be consoled.

A small courtly train entered the yard of the castle on the seventh day after the departure of the baron; and the old chamberlain soon craved admission for the Gaito,* Pietro: the chamberlain of Queen Margaret:—one who enjoyed as much of his mistress's favour as she could spare from the High Admiral. And much pious Christians marveled that a Catholic sovereign should place so much confidence in a Saracen eunuch who was more than suspected of still being, in heart, a follower of the false prophet of Mecca.

He was admitted into the presence of the countess: and in courtly language, re-

* Gaito originally meant captain; but was granted as a title of honour by the Normans to their Saracen functionaries.

peated the invitation of the queen that the noble Clemence would immediately grace the circle which she had collected around her at the palace of the Favara.

“At the Favara!” exclaimed the countess : “how long has she been there? I had not heard that she had left the Alcazar.”

“It is but a sudden fancy of her Highness,” replied the chamberlain. “Since noon only has she sought the Mar Dolce :* she deemed that the waters of the Albehira† and the shady plantations around would be delightful in this oppressive weather. Messengers have been sent to summon the most noble ladies of Palermo to join in her pastime ; but her Grace wished to show peculiar honour to the Countess of Catanzaro, and I myself was specially directed to wait upon her.”

* Mar Dolce, or Sweet Sea, is the translation of the Arabic name Favara.

† Albehira is a corruption of Al Bahar, the sea or lake around the palace.

“I am beholden to her kindness,” observed the countess rather sulkily: “and though in no mood for court festivities, I will immediately attend her summons.”

She clapped her hands, and her chamberlain came to the call.

“Have three or four archers mounted, good Philip,” she said, “to escort us to the Favara on the summons of the queen. Come, Catherine,” she said to a bright-eyed girl who had been bent over an embroidery frame in the recess of a window during the preceding conference, but whose wandering glances showed how much more she thought of the invitation she overheard than of the needlework before her—“come, Catherine, thou shalt accompany me to this festive gathering.”

The young girl started from her stool, and clapped her hands with glee.

“Shall I order a litter for your ladyship and the signorina?” asked the chamberlain.

“A litter, Philip, no,” replied the countess; “let my women follow in one with my things, an thou wilt: but I and Catherine will ride. We must remember whose blood flows in our veins, and not degenerate into Greeks. Come, Carina, the ride will be pleasant.”

They left the room together; the arm of the countess twined round the waist of her humble friend. Half an hour afterwards, both were mounted on strong Norman horses—very different from the little palfreys used by the Saracen and Greek natives of the island—and sallied from the gate of the old castle. Four mounted troopers followed their lady; and with them, in friendly converse, rode the court chamberlain, Pietro, and his three attendants. The lady Clemence felt her spirits revive within her; and gladly strove to co-operate with the influence of the scenery, and to cast off the anxious thoughts and feelings that had depressed her for the last week.

The lady's light-heartedness, however, soon received a check. They had but just emerged from the gorge in the hills which formed the shortest road from the castle of Beni-zekher to Palermo, and had entered the beautiful forest from which, a few years later, sprang the gorgeous church of Mon-reale, when the escort was joined by a score of mounted and well-armed troopers, who had evidently been in wait for them in that wooded glade. No word of explanation passed between the new comers and the Gaito; who, with his personal attendants and half of the strangers, placed himself at the head of the little cavalcade, while the others fell silently to the rear, and closely followed the countess. She instantly suspected some foul play; and, shaking the reins of her charger, cantered up to the side of the eunuch.

“What means this addition to my escort, signor Gaito?” she cried, anxiously and angrily: “and what means this warlike division of the party?”

“The wish of her highness the Queen, to show all honour to the Countess of Catanzaro,” answered the man, with the same civility as he had before shown; although our heroine could not fail to perceive a certain expression of subdued irony play about the dark corner of his mouth.

“I decline such courtesy,” cried the countess. “Ho, Catherine, and you, my faithful followers, let us ride back to the castle!”

“That may scarcely be, lady,” interposed the Gaito, making a motion as though he would seize her bridle; while his followers closed round her little party: “That may scarcely be: as my orders are to conduct you to the Favara.”

The four men-at-arms of the countess instantly drew their swords, on perceiving the threatening aspect of their escort; while the countess made her horse curvet to the left, and, with his huge hind quarters, nearly pushed the African and his slender palfrey to the heather together. But she perceived

how hopeless would be any attempt to resist, with her four followers, the endeavour to restrain her that might be made by six times their number of armed men. She, therefore, quietly signed to them to put up their arms; while, turning to the discomfited Saracen, she said, "To the Favara be it, then: and well for thee, sir knave, if thou exceed not the orders of thy mistress."

Once more they rode forward: and, passing the beautiful gardens of the Ziza, they skirted those lovely hills that environ Palermo. They soon crossed the stream of the Oreto, and rode through the towering wood of palm trees that had been long renowned as the oldest and largest in the known regions of the earth.* The church of San Giovanni (now De' Leprosi), the oldest erection of the Normans that now

* This wood was afterwards (in 1325) cut down in mere spite by the troops of one of the kings of Naples who devastated Sicily during some civil war. Thus have the Spanish sovereigns laboured to secure the affection of the Italians.

remains in the island (having been built at the very time when the gallant Roger was carrying on the siege of Palermo)—the church of San Giovanni soon showed its little cupola, bright in the rays of the sun, now setting behind the hills of Monte Pellegrino.

It was the festival of what the Sicilians, owing to their long connexion with the Greeks, still called the “Sleep,” or the “Repose of the Blessed Virgin:”—the day of her death, on which she had ceased from the labours of life:—but which in the west, out of deference to a pious but unestablished opinion, that the body was taken up to heaven, is denominated the Assumption. A crowd, when compared with the size of the building itself, was pouring from the open gate of the church as our cavalcade came in sight. The people had been attending vespers with all the fervour of Christians in a pagan community, from whose thrall they had been wonderfully

delivered ; and they soon dispersed through the inviting lanes and alleys that led back to different parts of the city. From the crowd of the placid-looking devotees, two ladies, followed by a small escort, quickly disengaged themselves, and approached the cavalcade. They were joined by Richard MacMardagh, the baron of Taverna's squire ; and he and Theresa, who had undertaken this little pilgrimage of piety with a friend, were soon buried in such serious converse that they had not yet become aware of its approach. Suddenly, they both looked up ; and were then so near the Countess Clemence that Theresa darted between the horsemen at her side, before they could foresee the intended movement, and grasped her hand, and bore it to her lips with fervour.

“ Maria Santissima ! what means this escort ? ” she anxiously whispered, as the lady pulled up her charger.

“ I know not, Theresa,” answered the

countess, in an under tone, "but I suspect some treachery on the part of the queen or king—it matters not which, as the admiral must be at the bottom of it."

"And whither are they taking you, lady?" asked the thoughtful friend of her childhood.

"To the Favara, I am told; to meet Queen Margaret. Let some one watch, and take word to my uncles."

Theresa made a slight gesture towards MacMardagh, who stood behind her, as though she would indicate him as the one who should fulfil the duty she spoke of.

"No! no: not him," interposed the countess, hurriedly, while a deep crimson overspread her fair face. "Why is he not with his lord?"

"Lady," said MacMardagh, stepping forward respectfully, but boldly, "I shall serve you with my life, and shall look to no consequences but your safety. My lord is far away: but trust in me, and your bidding

shall be my law until you are in safety with your friends. I am an Irishman—not an Italian.”

“Excuse me, noble countess,” exclaimed the Gaito, Pietro, riding up ; “but the queen will grieve if so much of the day be spent before you join her. I must pray you ride on.”

“Farewell,” said Clemence to Theresa, as she squeezed her hand, which the other fervently pressed to her lips. A look of mingled gratitude and confidence rewarded the professions of the honest Irishman, and the cavalcade again moved on towards its destination.

And now they approached the dull square building of plain ashlar stones, joined without cement, which former generations of Saracens had raised to be the delight of the age of which we write, and the admiration of antiquaries of our own period. Differing from the other Saracenic palaces of the Cuba and Ziza, it had one row of windows

looking towards the outside at the summit of the building; but as the other parts of the walls, in which Europeans were wont to expect to see windows, were filled up with panels, slightly sunk in the wall, these few pointed apertures could not take from the whole pile the appearance of a prison, with the character of which Clemence of Catanzaro now readily invested it in her own mind. A taller pile, more in the character of a Norman keep, had been added by the late king; and, while this towered above it on one side, the other portion of the quadrangle was encumbered by remains of Mahomedan baths, which, unsuited to the taste of the present owners of the villa, had been long suffered to go to decay. But it was for its beautiful gardens, and the abundance of water that bathed its walls, that the Favara had been most renowned amongst successive generations. Favara in Arabic, or Mar Dolce in Italian, being the appropriate name of this palace of “the

sweet waters;" while the pond around it was so extensive as to have won from its first possessors the name of Al Bahar and Albahira—or the sea.

On the side of this lake, furthest from that on which our cavalcade approached, extended the "park," which, rising on the sloping ground behind, showed to the spectator its delightful gardens beyond the water. Here all kinds of trees vied which should give the most delightful shade or the most aromatic perfume. Perpetual springs and streams wound through the turf, and imparted a delightful verdure and freshness to the grounds. Thickets of bay and of evergreen myrtles shed their perfume through the air. Little ornamented pleasure-houses and pavilions studded the gardens; and, in one part of the grounds, that were used as a chase, served as safe retreats, from which the ladies of the court might observe all kinds of wild animals, that are either delightful to the taste or pleasing

to the eye, wander freely in their shady enclosure.

Such is the enthusiastic description which writers of the period, in which we are interested, give of this ancient African retreat. Our heroine approached it by the side of the lake out of which it seemed to rise; and could not help marking with delight the different attractions of the spot, and the elegance of the little pavilion that sprung out of the centre of the water, and was joined to the palace by a slender bridge of almost aerial lightness. The cavalcade turned an angle of the building, and was soon lost to sight in its large inner court.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Before the mansion lay a lucid lake,
Broad as transparent, deep, and freshly fed
By a river, which its softened way did take
In currents through the calmer waters spread
Around: the wild fowl nestled in the brake
And sedges, brooding in their liquid bed:
The woods sloped downwards to its brink and stood
With their green faces fixed upon the flood.”—*Byron*.

ONE hour later, Richard MacMardagh rejoined Theresa and her friend, who had waited for him in the church and the wood of palm-trees we have mentioned. She hurried forwards as she saw him approach, and anxiously inquired what he had discovered.

“ Treachery, Signorina; treachery, as usual, in this bright land of yours. There is no sign of any Queen at the Favara. I followed the cavalcade, and saw it enter the

courtyard. The outer bars were immediately closed; but I could see through them that the building is much too quiet for Queen Margaret to be holding her court therein. Not a knight or dame was stirring about the place: and the men-at-arms led their horses to the stables, and then laid themselves about the benches, or began to play at the Mora, with more noise than they would have dared make had the queen been in the palace."

"Santa Maria, how strange?" exclaimed Theresa.

"I did more," continued MacMardagh. "I inquired of the cottagers near if the queen were holding court at the place, and they told me to use my eyes and ears."

"It is clear the sweet lady is entrapped into a prison, as she suspected," said Theresa sighing. "What is to be done?"

"By St. Patrick, set her free, to be sure!" replied the Irishman: "though I have no notion, as yet, how it can be managed."

“What a blessed chance it was,” said Theresa, as she turned to resume her walk towards Palermo, “what a blessed chance it was that the baron did not take you with him into Italy!”

“No chance in the matter, fair mistress. He had need to leave some one behind him in whom he could trust; and naturally preferred an Irishman to a Greek or an Italian or a Saracen, or even to a Norman, if it may be said without offence;—so at least I always thought until I became acquainted with your fair self, Madamina.”

“A truce then to your Irish nonsense,” replied the maiden gravely. “Let us think what can be done for the dear countess.”

“As to that, mistress,” replied MacMardagh, “as to that, I shall take the liberty of watching your own lord, the High Admiral, amongst others. Methinks the Lady Clemence spoke truly when she deemed that he was at the bottom of her present trouble.”

Theresa made no answer ; and, buried in thought, they walked on side by side for a few minutes. At length she again spoke. "What I marvel at most," she said, "is that your lord and the archbishop, who is his kinsman, should have become such great friends, as they seem to be of late, with the Lord High Admiral."

"And why should they not, I pray?" asked the Irishman.

"Only," said the female, "only that it is not so many weeks since the kinsman of the archbishop was done to death on the square of the Alcazar. Have you forgotten the circumstance?"

"In faith, no. Could I forget the day on which I first became acquainted with you? Do you not remember, as we were riding back to the Torre di Baych, that we saw the gibbets on the square; and I pointed out the seeming beggar beneath whose cloak the archbishop's livery peeped out; and told you how he was slyly pelting

stones at the dogs who wanted to mangle one of the bodies? That body was, as I suspected, that of a kinsman of the archbishop. But what of that? The king would have him done to death. The Admiral had no hand in the matter."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Theresa hurriedly; and then as suddenly checking herself.

"What mean you?" asked MacMardagh, stopping in his walk and turning short upon her.

Theresa remained silent.

"By all the saints in heaven! tell me what you mean," repeated MacMardagh, seizing her hand with energy.

"Leave me. Let me think for a few moments," replied his companion gently and seriously. "Let me think."

The Irishman let fall her hand; and turning peevishly round, stamped with his foot upon the dusty ground. Every second that he waited thus seemed an age to his

impatience. At length, he turned again, half angrily, towards his companion. A sweet calm was upon her features. Her lips were moving almost imperceptibly. Her eyes were cast up to heaven; and she was secretly making the sign of the cross upon her chest within her veil.

“By heavens!” cried MacMardagh angrily, “she is praying! Much as I like you, Signorina, and much as you slight my words, methinks you might find some other time for your prayers than when you know that I am bursting with impatience, and that life or death to more than one may depend upon your answer!”

“And therefore, good Riccardo, did I pray,” replied the young girl meekly, laying her hand upon his arm to stay his impatient gestures. “I knew what influence my answer might have upon the proud and fiery nature of those to whom it might be repeated, and I prayed for light from above to show me whether I ought to tell all that I know of the matter.”

“ Well ? ” inquired MacMardagh, half surlily. “ Well ? ”

“ I hope I have not erred in the judgment I have come to,” she answered ; “ it surely cannot be wrong to unmask treachery such as, I fear me, is now at work. Listen, then. On the day after the execution, I was with the queen and the children at the palace. The king was lying on a couch ; and he carelessly asked me what people said of the executions. I replied that I feared they were displeased that the kinsman of the archbishop should have been done to death with so much indignity. The king replied, in his languid manner : ‘ Majone would have it so : I cannot think what made him so eager for it.’ ”

“ He did, did he ? ” cried MacMardagh. “ Let friend Majone look to it ! Mistress Theresa, cannot you walk a little quicker ? ” he said, impetuously hurrying on before her. “ These are matters that must not go to sleep. I will hie me instantly to the

archbishop;—I will overtake my Lord of Taverna;—I will—”

“Do nothing rashly, good Riccardo,” interposed Theresa kindly. “Think how much may follow from whatever course you may adopt. Think; and, would you believe me, pray.”

He returned quietly to her side; and, apologizing to her friend for having so neglected her, more slowly even than before they all continued their walk back to Palermo.

Meanwhile, the Countess Clemence had been invited to dismount in the court of the Favara, and had been conducted, by the Gaito, with all courtesy, to the further side of the quadrangle—one of those that rose from the fair waters around. Here he had obsequiously taken his leave of her; beseeching her to entertain herself until his royal mistress should make her appearance.

“And when will that be?” asked the

lady, with a look of scorn and irony equal to that which she saw the African felt, but dared not openly exhibit.

“The holy prophet—I mean the blessed face of Lucca,” he repeated, correcting his first exclamation by using, not very intelligibly, an ejaculation frequent in the mouth of his sovereign,—“the blessed face of Lucca only knows! Meanwhile, here be two slaves will give all attendance upon your signoria; and the apartments of the palace will afford you exercise and amusement. It is only a pity that his grace, the king, should be so unwilling to enjoy himself, as to have allowed this fair spot to have fallen into a decay very different from the blissful appearance I am told that it wore under its rightful owners. Allah have you in his keeping, lady!”

“The treason and blasphemy of thy speech, knave, show that thou thinkest thyself safe in the presence of a prisoner,” said the Countess indignantly.

“Begone, sirrah,” she added, as he still lingered.

The African hesitated a moment, and then with a lowly Eastern obeisance backed out of the vaulted chamber.

On his return to the courtyard, the four followers of the Countess were, by his orders, quickly disarmed, and locked in a guardroom above the dungeon. Sentinels were placed on the different terraces, and in several of the long galleries of the building, with orders to watch and ward as if the palace were in a state of siege: and then, having made these preparations, the chamberlain found his way to the mouth of one of those secret passages which, old chronicles tell us, led under the ground to the royal palace of Palermo. By one of these he quickly retraced his way to the alcazar, and reported to the Queen and the High Admiral, whom he found closeted together, the success of his morning's expedition.

“Then your son-in-law, that is to be, is safe from *her* blandishments at all events,” remarked the sovereign complacently to her friend.

“I am the more obliged to your grace for having permitted her to be decoyed in your honoured name,” replied the minister.

When left alone by the departure of the African, the Countess had thrown herself disconsolately on a couch at the upper end of the apartment, and buried her face in her hands. Her young companion, Catherine, cast herself on another near, and sobbed bitterly. Neither spoke. For a few minutes Clemence maintained the same position unmoved; but no sign betrayed that she felt any of the sorrow that convulsed her companion. She might be, and probably was, buried in deep thought. After a short while she started lightly to her feet, and exclaiming, “Cheer up, Cattarina mia! cheer up! we shall never get out of our prison by despondency and

tears," she put her arm round her waist, and led her to the long gallery or balcony, which, in those days, ran round that side of the palace, nearly on a level with the surface of the pond.

The sun was setting in front of them. Its bright rays gleamed over the water, unruffled by the slightest wavelet, save where some rare aquatic fowls swam slowly across it, and, curling it up on each side of their broad breasts, left a bright line of light on its surface to mark the quickly-closing way. An armed sentinel already paced the further extremity of the gallery.

"Let us see how far our liberty extends," said the Countess; and, arm in arm with her companion, she walked boldly up to where he stood. As the ladies approached, the soldier lowered his partisan across the way, with a look of deference; but yet he so forbade their further advance.

"So, then," said the lady, turning back, "we know the extent of our walks in this

direction. Let us examine the inside of the old palace." And they turned into another apartment by one of the windows which communicated between it and the balcony. "I will tell thee frankly, dear Catherine," she continued, "that I do not mean to remain here one hour longer than is absolutely necessary. I wish to examine well our prison bounds, that we may devise the best means of escaping beyond them."

They walked through various apartments in that side of the building, all communicating with one another. All the rooms had vaulted ceilings, ornamented with the beautiful Moorish honeycomb carvings and mosaics; and the floors of all were inlaid with marble of many colours. All were furnished richly, although the garniture bore evidence of not having been recently used. A narrow stair led them to a succession of rooms above. Here they missed the gallery that ran round in front of the lower rooms; and here also, were no win-

dows, save those that looked into the wide courtyard by which they had entered the palace. These rooms were furnished in a less costly manner than those below, as not being needed by the royal family and by their guests when they came here to spend the day only: and, since the reign of the present king, these expeditions had not been extended for a longer period. One or two rooms were handsomely furnished: others again contained only a few broken articles of ancient Saracen upholstery; and not a few were completely empty. The Countess tried the several doors in each room: all were bolted on the outside that led to other divisions of the palace. The last room of all joined on to a turret built in later years: a door seemed to lead into the body of the tower. She tried it also; but, on opening, it only showed her an empty circular room, on the floor of which was piled, in much disorder, ancient and broken armour of many different ages and

countries:—probably some of the spoils which the warlike ancestor of the present king had won from the former owners of the Favara and of the country when he was encamped in the beautiful plain below.

“Alas! dear lady,” exclaimed Catherine, as they slowly closed the door and began to retrace their steps; “alas! it is impossible and useless to think of escaping!”

“Tush! tush, ma chère!” replied her friend. “I own that I see no possible outlet: but what will despondency avail us? Let us trust in the protection of the good saints, and of the blessed Mother of God, who died this day. And now,” she continued cheerfully, “let us go down and see if our jailors will give us some refreshment; for I own that I am fatigued by our morning’s ride.”

CHAPTER X.

“How poor an instrument
May do a noble deed ! he brings me liberty.
My resolution 's placed, and I have nothing
Of woman in me : now, from head to foot,
I am marble constant : now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.” *Antony and Cleopatra.*

WE have said that the Baron of Taverna had landed at Taranto, and was proceeding, as the representative of the king and Majone, to endeavour to persuade the confederate barons of Calabria and Puglia to lay down their arms and believe in the loyalty of the omnipotent minister. Envoys had announced his coming ; and a day had been appointed on which he should meet the rebels amid the ruins of the strong town of Bari. Meanwhile, Taverna himself lingered in his castle of Monte Cassano

in the neighbourhood. He had been long accustomed to spend there many months of each summer, in the midst of his Calabrian fiefs; and bitter was the contrast which he now drew between his present anxious feelings and his foregone lightheartedness.

As the day approached on which he was to meet his brother peers, more and more distasteful to him became the character he had assumed. When every rumour that met his ear told of some fresh city or count that had risen in arms to resist the orders of the detested High-Admiral, how could he run counter to the general feeling, and face the proudest nobility in the world as the apologist of the upstart minister, as the future son-in-law of the low-born dispenser of kingly favours? His pride alone would have made his position hateful to him: but when he remembered that he had withdrawn his suit of the noble Countess Clemence to attain this degrading place, he idly and madly reprobated his own folly, which had

left no possible escape, either for his pride or for his love.

It was the day of the conference; and the envoy of the king and of the minister rode into Bari at the head of a splendid escort of armed followers. One large church alone remained standing amid the ruins of the city; and many a banner, planted in the ground around it, declared the names of the powerful feudatories who were there assembled to hear the excuses and the orders of their sovereign. Further off, beyond the demolished ramparts, tents of silk and of gold and silver cloth brightly shone, in the noonday sun, amid multitudes of armed men; and declared the power and the wealth of the Count of Consa, of Boemondo of Manopello, of Philip of Sangro, of Ruggiero dell' Aquila, and of many other leaders of the wide-spread conspiracy. Even the banner of Gilbert, Count of Gravina, a cousin of the queen, was there, to testify his zeal to release his sovereign from

the thralldom in which the High-Admiral was supposed to hold him. Melfi, Salerno, Naples, and other cities, had their representatives amid the warlike host: and the military instruments of all resounded half in defiance and half in honour of the young envoy, as, with brows contracted and cheeks flushed with shame, he slowly rode forward to justify him of whom a nation in arms declared their abhorrence and contempt.

He was received with deference by the leaders around the old church, and honourably conducted within its walls. His chaplain then read the letters, countersigned with the royal signet, in which William called upon his unruly vassals to disperse their followers, and receive the officers appointed over the different towns by his faithful and trusted Lord High-Admiral. A burst of execration from the assembly hailed the name, and showed in what contempt the odious favourite was held. The meeting became disorderly. The reading

of the remainder of the letters was unattended to, amid exclamations that the documents were forged,—that the king himself had been poisoned by Majone,—and that the latter only waited an opportunity to place the crown on his own base-born brows.

“Peace and silence all!” exclaimed Taverna, now aroused to anger, and forgetting the feelings of shame and shyness which had weighed him down in solitude: “Peace and silence all!—Forgive me, brother barons and counts,” he continued, as the assembly was startled into angry silence by his fierce and domineering outburst; “forgive me that I speak in this tone of authority. I adopt it not as the envoy of the sovereign; but as one of yourselves, as a Norman nobleman, I resent the imputation that I would be the bearer of forged documents. My own honour resents it; and sure I am that you would not wish one of yourselves to listen tamely to a charge

which you would each individually resent. Such a charge against one of our order is an imputation upon us all. Let it not be repeated. I say the king lives."

"Better, then, that he were dead!" cried the Count of Sangro, in a somewhat subdued tone.

"Deem you so?" asked Taverna. "It was not I who said so," he continued, in an ambiguous tone of voice which implied even more than the words insinuated. "But I am not surprised that the people of Bari should feel exasperated when they look on these yet almost smoking ruins. I am not an old man, brother Normans and Italians—for we have now all the same interest at heart, the good of our native or adopted country—I am not an old man; but yet, for how many years have I delighted in the magnificence of this the most ancient and noble seat of Grecian empire in Italy! How I used to marvel at its warehouses thronged with the merchandise

of the world ; at the splendid palaces of its nobles ; at the countless multitudes of its citizens ; at the refinement of its people ; at the impregnable strength of its walls ! Where are they now, I ask ? Who laid low all this wealth, all this grandeur, all this civilization ? During a popular tumult, the citadel, which had been built to overawe its just liberties, was destroyed by an excited people. Who then led an avenging army to its gates ? Who received its suppliant people when they crawled out to ask for pardon ? Who cried, in a voice of fury, ‘ As ye have served my house, the citadel, so will I serve your own ’ ? Who gave this countless multitude of old men and young, of tender virgins, of innocent infants, of holy priests, and of decrepid veterans worn out in the wars of our fathers,—who gave them two short days to remove themselves and all that was dear to them ? Who undermined those walls that had been the terror of the East ? Who unroofed those

houses in which the wealthy and the poorest citizens had heaped up the pride of ages? Who levelled every stone that stood upon a stone, and made a plough turn up these once noble streets? Was that done by the High-Admiral? Is it his handiwork that you see smoking around you? Not so, indeed! Majone was then, as usual, busy with the fleet or in his study in Sicily, labouring for the good of the kingdom; while one, whose cause you are here to vindicate, arose from his sloth and gave vent to his natural fierceness. The High-Admiral, however, laboured but to control his passions. See what they prompt when freed from his guidance."

Unbroken silence greeted the conclusion of this address. Not one of the assembled barons could deny that the king had ever shown the relentless cruelty of a barbarian when freed from the superintendence of Majone; and they were at the same time startled by the boldness of the envoy who

strove to exonerate the minister though at the expense of the sovereign. At length Mario Borello—a professor in what was, even then, the celebrated college of Salerno, a man whose influence had not only drawn his own town into the conspiracy, but was exerted widely over the chivalry of the kingdom—came forward; and waving his arm majestically to the impetuous knights, who were on the point of giving vent to their feelings, exclaimed: “Your defence, Signor Barone, proves too much. You excuse the minister by criminating the king. Who, then, will doubt the truth of those rumours which charge the minister with designs against his sovereign, since his very son-in-law almost instigates feelings of rebellion? You have pledged yourself, monsignore, that the king is alive: no one here will dispute your word. But what avails his life to his nobility and to his people, if, buried in the recesses of the palace, he commits the whole charge of the

kingdom to an unworthy favourite? We all know that King William is revengeful, is cruel; but his passions are excited by great events only. What we object to, is, that a low-born adventurer should possess every place of honour and of power with his own creatures: should remove the noble-born and the trustworthy from every situation of command: should oppress the country with taxes imposed by his own avarice: should condemn our daughters to the cloister, or to unmarried lives in their homes, that their possessions may revert to their feudal sovereign: should debar us all from his presence, and from holding with him that intercourse which one noble Norman is entitled to hold with the most worthy of his peers. In this light only have we been taught to look upon our sovereign. We are not Greeks, to tremble at the thought of an unseen and unknown despot! The days are not so long past since our fathers, and the father of William

of Hauteville, fought together around the plains of Aversa: the days are not so long past since together, brother pilgrims, or brother knights, we invaded this garden of the world, and called on its degraded inhabitants to yield to stronger arms the land which they were unworthy to possess, and unable to defend: the days are not so long past since, brothers in arms, we defeated the emperors of Germany and of Constantinople, leagued with the Pope against us; and since, falling on our knees before the imprisoned successor of St. Peter, we besought him to pardon the victory which he had compelled us to win over him: the days are not so long past since, in an open boat, we, brothers in arms, invaded the proud empire which the Saracens had established in Sicily, and won back that seagirt paradise to the faith of Christians:—and shall we—we who achieved all these wondrous victories under the guidance of chieftains elected from amongst ourselves

because they were the most worthy of ourselves, and enthroned on a buckler to receive the fealty of brothers in arms,—shall we, who are the sons of those who thus elected the father of the present king to be the most honoured of themselves, obey his authority when delegated, by the son of an Italian oil-seller, to the eunuchs and minions of a court? Deem it not! Away with so degrading an usurpation! Of yourself, Monsignore, I would not speak harshly. I crave pardon for having been compelled to express myself as I have done of one who is to be honoured by your alliance. But the spirit of Norman chivalry lives in the breasts of those around me; and they, at least, will not forget whose blood still beats in their hearts.”

“Down with Majone!”

“Down with the base-born oil-seller!”

“Harou on the knave!” exclaimed many a voice from the excited throng at the conclusion of this stirring address.

“You see, young man,” exclaimed the old Count of Tricario, raising his grey head above the shoulders of the most stalwart knight near him; “you see what spirit animates the chivalry of Normandy. Believe not your own parentage by uniting yourself to the daughter of the upstart.”

“Join us! join us!” exclaimed a dozen frank and manly voices. “Surely there be noble damsels of your own degree as fair as the daughter of the villain.”

“You see, young man,” expostulated the old Count again, “you see what spirit animates us. We will never succumb to Majone; and in warring with the base-born knave we would not willingly war with the father-in-law of one of ourselves.”

“You are all too solemn,” said Ruggiero dell’ Aquila, Count of Avellino, pressing forward. He was a handsome young man, whose regular features and fine bright complexion made him look to be scarcely more than twenty years of age. “You are too

solemn," he said cheerfully. "No doubt we are all heroes, and are in arms for the good of our country; but, perhaps, some other little private motives urge us on. For my own part I confess that I hate old Majone ten times more than ever, since he has refused me the king's permission to wed the lady of my heart, as the *trouveurs* say;" and he laid his hand frankly on the shoulder of the young Count of Sanseverino beside him. "Now, seigneur of Taverna," he said, "join our patriot squadrons, and we will pledge ourselves to see you married to the Lady Clemence of Catanzaro. Ha! ha! I have touched you, have I?"

The Baron of Taverna did, indeed, start visibly at this unexpected appeal to his secret feelings. A link of sympathy was touched, and ran through the meeting. Many of those present remembered the thoughtless talk of former days, which had attributed to the present envoy an attachment for the high-born widow. The formality of the

conference was at an end. Old friends crowded round him, and urged him not to sacrifice himself. Those who were more intimate represented to him the degradation of an union with one so much beneath his own rank. All besought him to burst asunder the unworthy bonds that enthralled him, and to join his peers and countrymen in their efforts to remove the hated minister: and all pledged their word that, so soon as Majone's death or exile was accomplished, they would compel the king to reward him with the hand of the Countess.

It may be well surmised that such language could not have been held, or such proposals have been made to one in the position then occupied by our hero, unless he himself had shown an unsteadiness of purpose, and a wavering intention that encouraged the tamperers with his loyalty. True it is that his want of resolution had again betrayed him: and that, after all the regrets he had so long secretly but bitterly

felt at having involved himself with Majone; this appeal from those whose opinion he feared and respected, this appeal to his family pride and to his secret love, came with a power that he could not at once resist. Still he spoke not. Although he permitted others to call upon him, in the name of honour, to betray his patron and pledged father-in-law, there was another sense of honour within that saved him from giving way to his and their passions. He was perplexed: he doubted: and the appearance of perplexity and of doubt but encouraged the tempters to press around him with their arguments.

Voices in subdued contention were heard outside the porch of the old cathedral; and shortly afterwards a squire, followed by a trooper heated and white with dust, pushed into the assembly. The former pressed up to the side of his lord, the Baron of Taverna, and drew his attention to the breathless man-at-arms.

“I hope your lordship will call these insolent warders to account,” exclaimed the latter angrily, “for delaying one on a mission to your signoria. Methinks the followers of the king’s own oratore might pass without challenge.”

“Peace, Giacomo,” cried our hero. “What wouldst thou?”

“Nay, then,” replied the man, “an it pleases your signoria, perhaps I had better hold my peace and go back again to the castle.”

A frown from his master made his bold humour quail: and with awkward reverence he added, “Here, in this gauntlet which the knaves outside thought I had taken off my hand ready to cast down before them, in this gauntlet, is one who will tell my errand as well as her own. Such messengers are not sent without cause: and your lordship has always wished to see them as soon as they alighted at Monte Cassano.”

He opened the gauntlet, which he bore

in his uncovered hand, and, with some little difficulty, drew out a trembling carrier pigeon, such as, in those days, were constantly employed in Sicily in all cases of emergency. The Saracens had formerly introduced the use of them ; and few were the lords of any power who did not now keep such to communicate between their different castles. Taverna took the fluttering bird, and raised its trembling wing. Underneath was a tiny packet, closed with a silken band. It bore no superscription ; but Taverna recognized the seal of the signet ring which he had left with Richard MacMardagh in Palermo, and, drawing his dagger from his belt, anxiously cut the thread. He gave back the bird to the squire, and perused the writing in silence. His brow became contracted ; he clenched his teeth : then stamping angrily with his heavy boot, he held out one hand to Ruggiero dell' Aquila, and the other to the old gray-haired Count of Tricario ; and ex-

claimed, vehemently, "I am with you! Friends, your cause is mine. Death or exile to Majone!"

A shout of rapture hailed the avowal: and the assembled barons repeated with fierce sympathy, "Death or exile to Majone!"

"Think me not fickle," exclaimed our hero, when the noise had somewhat subsided. "Here I find evidence that the butcher has betrayed me and the good archbishop, by causing one to be put to death whose murder he solemnly charged upon the king. Moreover, he has—he has," he repeated, with some hesitation, "seized upon the Countess of Catanzaro and confined her a prisoner in the Favara. I cannot doubt the writer of this. I have been betrayed and deluded;—and I will be revenged!"

It is needless to say how the assembled conspirators fanned the flame which the unexpected intelligence he had just received

had awakened in the breast of the late envoy; while they listened to the details he gave of the Admiral's duplicity, and of the wiles by which he had engaged the Archbishop of Palermo and himself to join in the conspiracy which was to have placed little Roger on the throne of his father. This was a step to which the feelings of the assembled nobles did not, at present, impel them. Majone was the one object of their hostility; and they were willing to give the king a chance of amending his evil ways when he, who was supposed to be the instigator of them, should be removed. The idea sank, however, into their minds, and became settled there, as a possible contingency for the future; but as yet they were loyal subjects; and they bent all their resolves to the removal of the obnoxious minister whom they believed to be plotting against the life and throne of their sovereign.

Nothing remained to be done but to

settle their plans of operation ; and these were soon determined. The kingdom, from the Papal States to the Faro, was to be aroused ; and all the orders issued and officers appointed by the king were to be disregarded, so long as Majone was minister. Matteo of Taverna was impatient to return to Sicily. There could he arm his own vassals, and encourage the disaffection of the islanders ; there could he explain to the archbishop the manner in which they had been deluded—

“ And there,” interposed Ruggiero dell’ Aquila, “ thou canst set at large the Lady Clemence. Nay, blush not, friend : we all understand one another, and we will redeem our pledge.”

Strange as it may seem, a serenity and light-heartedness, which he had not known since his first interview with Majone, came over the mind of our hero. His wavering and unsettled fancies were all laid at rest. He marvelled how he could ever have been

entangled by them. His course in life was clear—had ever been so, could he but have followed it. With those of his own order, he must strive against the oppressor. With them he must rise or fall. As an independent chieftain, he must woo the partner suited to him by birth and fortune; and if Abderachman, or the king himself, laid snares for his property or his life, as an independent chieftain must he do battle for his rights, and defend the walls of his many castles against whomsoever should attack them.

At times, it is true that the prophecy or warning of the white figure of the mountains of San Martino came across his mind. But, strong in his own resolve, he thought of it only as a man, recovered from illness, thinks of the hallucinations of his delirium. He was backed by friends, and had emerged from boyhood. He was a man, resolved and ready to do.

Full of high purposes, he rode back to his castle of Monte Cassano, and two days afterwards set forth on his return to Palermo, with all the followers whom he could collect and arm on so short a notice.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Would he were fatter!—But I fear him not.

Yet if my name were liable to fear,

I do not know the man I should avoid

So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much ;

He is a great observer, and he looks

Quite through the deeds of men.” *Julius Cæsar.*

WHILE this meeting was being held at Bari, events no less important to the success of the conspiracy which the High Admiral had so carefully organized, were taking place at Palermo. Acting upon his avowed maxim that, when a thing was once determined on, the sooner it was done the better, that worthy plotter sallied forth from his tower of Baych, and, attended by the small escort of eunuchs who always guarded his person, walked beyond the ramparts of the city to visit the archbishop

at his palace outside the walls. A friendly greeting opened the counsel of the allies ; and then the primate, rather anxiously, inquired if Majone had received any account of the progress made by his future son-in-law amongst the revolted barons.

“ Not yet, monsignore, not yet,” replied the admiral : “ nothing of importance could have taken place as yet, or word would have been sent to me through the air. We are, indeed, much beholden to the little birds who, as the ignorant vulgar think, whisper so many secrets to us : but still the plan has its inconveniences. The messengers may be shot on their flight by a thoughtless sportsman, or they may fall alive into other hands ; and even should they arrive safe, the packets which they are able to bear are necessarily so small, that the information they convey is often defective. Surely some improved mode of conveyance might be invented, instead of heavy chargers stumbling over stony roads, or

ships dependant upon every breath of the wind !”

“No doubt it might,” replied the archbishop ; “the Almighty gave in charge to man to subdue the earth : but instead of attending to this divine behest and making the very elements his creatures, man thinks of nothing but of subduing his fellow blunders through a brutal existence. And much, indeed, it grieves me that the fair prospects opened by the late king for the civilization of Sicily should have been so soon overshadowed ; and that I myself should, in some sort, have been compelled to take part in a matter that may retard still further the improvement of mankind, by producing disturbances which we cannot now foresee.”

“Never fear, never fear, monsignore !” answered Majone, cheerfully : “we must fulfil our part, and leave the rest to heaven !”

“Aye ; but we must adopt human means to maintain that which we know to be the will of heaven—glory to God and peace on

earth. And with the prayers of the saints to help me," continued the archbishop, "I will take such order that this revolution shall pass without violence or bloodshed."

"It was precisely on this matter that I came to consult with your reverence," said the admiral; "and I doubt not that, when the king is removed, our joint wisdom will subdue the earth and all our enemies. And, reverend sir, methinks the sooner we act upon our plans the better. Delay can avail us nothing. If Matteo of Taverna appeases the barons, they will go with us; and if he does not succeed in his mission of peace, it were well that we should have carried our designs into execution before they are able to organize their strength against us. I, therefore, propose that we commence the game forthwith."

"I conjure you, my Lord Admiral, speak not so lightly of a matter so serious, not only to us, but, maybe, to thousands. I am, however, glad to discuss the topic with you,

that we may discover if we clearly understand the plans we each entertain. In the first place, we are agreed that the king is to be removed."

"Like the ship which foundered yesterday in the Kaleh," said Majone, scoffingly.

"You would not kill him, monsignore?" exclaimed the archbishop, eagerly. "The preservation of his life was the first article of the compact we formed."

"Harbour not such thoughts against me," remonstrated the conspirator. "I know our compact, and I have a conscience, per Bacco!"

"I trust so," said the primate. "Let us proceed: the king removed, his son, little Ruggiero, is to be proclaimed in his place."

Majone nodded assent.

"And," continued the archbishop, "and we are to have no riots, no revolutions, no private vengeance"—

"Had mine been a vengeful disposition," interposed the admiral, in a somewhat boast-

ful tone, "methinks I could have gratified it as well by using the king's name as in my own."

"It is true," rejoined the archbishop. "The change, then," he pursued, "is to be effected with as little commotion or violence as possible. By whom is the government to be afterwards carried on, during the childhood and minority of the young king?"

"By those who shall have made him king, *per Bacco!*" cried Majone. "By a council composed of your lordship, myself, and Taverna. You will represent the clergy, I the Italians, and my son the Norman barons of the kingdom."

"I do not object to the proposal," said the archbishop, thoughtfully. "Perhaps we shall make as good a foundation as any, on which to form a regency or a council. But such a council being the representative of the sovereign, could only maintain its influence over the people so long as the people knew the boy-king to be advancing

worthily to that period at which he should take the supreme power into his own hands. To whom would you entrust the education and the formation of the character of the boy on whom so much must hereafter depend?"

"I would take charge of him myself," replied the admiral.

"You! my lord. Think you the people—above all, think you the Norman barons would be satisfied with such an arrangement?"

"Satisfied or not, I would allow of no other. Why, bethink you, my lord archbishop, that he who possesses the person of the boy I mean that it would not be safe to entrust him to any one who is not in our interests."

"Your manner, my Lord Admiral, alarms me: it would lead one to imagine that we might have different interests among ourselves."

"And if we had," retorted Majone, "I

know not why mine should not be supported as well as those of another."

"Let us discuss the matter calmly, and in good faith," remonstrated the archbishop, in whom the sinister manner of the admiral had reawakened ancient antipathies and prejudices, which their more recent alliance had barely hushed to sleep. "Let us discuss the question rationally. We have one object in view,—the good of the kingdom, and the education of the boy in such a manner as to make those who come after us, not only excuse our violence, but bless our memories for that we placed him upon his father's throne. Now, I say not one word against your lordship's competence to administer the affairs of the kingdom,—against your sagacity as a ruler, or your valour as a leader: but the education of youth demands different talents; the prejudices of the people different instructors."

"Your reverence, doubtless?" asked Majone, with a sneer.

“ Even so;” continued the primate. “ The clergy have ever been considered the best instructors of youth ; and, in this particular instance, it is most desirable that the young prince should be in the hands of those to whom the people can impute no sinister motive,—to whom they cannot attribute a design of supplanting him.”

Majone bit his lips ; and a flash of meaning, or rather of inquiry, lit up his eyes. It was instantly suppressed ; but not before it had been marked by the archbishop.

“ I speak frankly,” continued the latter : “ not, as you may well suppose, to insinuate any suspicion of your signoria on my own part ; but because, in the predicament in which we stand, it is necessary that we should consider in what light our proceedings may be viewed by others ; and that we should form our plans accordingly.”

“ And your reverence has finally determined that the education of the boy should be entrusted to the clergy ?”

“So much so, that, on this condition alone, would I proceed with our undertaking; because I am convinced that, on this condition alone would the people be without suspicion, and cheerfully obey the authority of his regents. I myself, monsignore, know you to be actuated by the purest motives for the good of our country; but we are not blind to the suspicions which have already caused the barons of Puglia to arm; and we must secure the peace of the country by removing every cause of dissatisfaction. May I hope that I have convinced you, and that you forgive my frankness?”

“My good lord, frankness to me is never an offence. Would that all the world were as open-hearted as are we two! But I have not time to discuss this matter further at present. Permit me to come and sup with you to-night. We will then finally resolve upon all our plans.”

The invitation was of course cheerfully

given ; and the Lord High Admiral took an affectionate leave of the primate. From the outer room, however, he turned back again, and said : “ You are quite resolved, my lord, that the boy must be given in charge to the clergy ? ”

“ Most immoveably so,” replied the Archbishop.

Majone nodded good-humouredly, and withdrew. “ The cunning old fox ! ” he muttered to himself. “ As if I should undertake all the labour and peril to place the boy in his keeping ! No, no : the pretty baubles I have prepared me at home, must not so long lack a wearer as his saintly guardianship would contrive.”

The archbishop, too, had his soliloquy. “ I suspect him,” he said : “ notwithstanding his assumed frankness, I read danger to the boy’s life in his eyes. Is it possible that the accusations of the barons and of the Pope are true ? ”

At the usual hour of supper, the friends

again met. Majone seemed full of open light-heartedness. He referred but casually to the subject of their morning discussion ; but casually he argued against the proposal of the primate : and, having drawn from him a reiteration of his resolve respecting the guardianship of the prince, he referred not again to the subject. They parted early ; Majone, in the Norman fashion, proposing a toast to the success of their enterprise. The archbishop assented, quaffed the wine poured out for him, and, with it, the poison which his friend had adroitly mixed in the goblet.

The plans of the Lord High Admiral had reached a crisis. His imprisonment of the Countess Clemence had driven his betrothed son-in-law into the ranks of his enemies ; and his eagerness to obtain possession of the person of his royal ward, had well-nigh betrayed his ultimate designs to the other conscientious conspirator. Poison should relieve him from the one : how

would he receive the news of the defection of the other? As yet, he knew it not. He went home, and again slept the sleep of innocence.

CHAPTER XII.

“Grim reader! did you ever see a ghost?

No, but you’ve heard—I understand. Be dumb,
And don’t regret the time you may have lost,
Because you’ve got that pleasure still to come.”

Byron.

THE short-lived twilight of the south was giving place to the shades of night: the moon would not rise for some hours: and all was dark and shadowy around the Saracenic palace of the Favara. Two soldiers paced one of the long galleries, to which we have alluded as abutting upon the apartments occupied by the Countess Clemence. In broken whispers, they conversed together as they peered through the increasing darkness.

“But when didst thou see it first?” eagerly asked one of the interlocutors.

“I myself have not been long in this accursed castle,” replied the man, “so that I did not come across it before last night: but Picard of Normandy and Giovanni tell me that they have often seen it. All the Saracens swear that it has ever haunted these ruins.”

“Bah! what should they know of the matter!” exclaimed the other.

“Marry, comrade, more than we do: since it is the spirit of one of their own princes that walks these ruins. They say it is the last emir, who was killed in battle by dame Eremburga, the wife of the Great Count.”

“No wonder he cannot rest satisfied, if he was such an ass as to let himself be killed by a woman!” replied the other soldier, scoffingly.

“Hist! dame Eremburga was as good a knight as ever laid lance in rest,” interposed the more credulous soldier. “Men do say that, when she had unhorsed him and given

him the mortal wound, she took some water in her skull-cap and baptized the dying infidel, all the while that he was protesting against the holy rite ; and that, for this reason, he can neither go to heaven or purgatory, which he ought to have done as a Christian ; nor to hell, which would have been awarded to him as a Saracen. His own people admit that there is some truth in the story ; and certain it is they all tell that his spirit walks these places in which he died."

"And thou didst see it last night, comrade?"

"As plain as I see thee now. I was on guard at the end of the long terrace above the water. The night was dark, and the crescent of the moon was just rising over the hills there. Suddenly, I heard an unearthly sound of jingling chains,—soft and, I should say, a far way off, but that I soon saw this figure appear at the other end of the gallery. It glided towards me slowly and silently."

“What was it like?”

“I know not. It must have been like a Saracen prince, to judge by the tales we have heard from the old men who conquered the country from the infidels. It was clad in armour of shining rings, from the neck to the knees. It wore a glittering skull-cap, round which was a silver turban, from which palm leaves, or something of that kind, stood out all around. It had one of the round shields, too, that all the Saracens wear: and in its right hand a silver lance, twice as long as those our knights carry. We have all heard of the wonderful enchanted lance the last soldan used to bear to the wars.”

“’Tis strange, Giacomo; it must have been him,” observed the other soldier. “The saints grant it may not come to me when I am on watch to-night!”

“If it does, I advise thee to do as I did,” replied his companion. “When I saw it gliding my way, as stately as if it had been

the king of the devils, and pointing that enchanted lance right towards me, I shut my eyes and made the sign of the cross, and muttered over all the prayers I could think of."

"And what happened?"

"When I opened them again, after a while, the figure was gone. No doubt those prayers had scared it away: and the sign of the cross;—there is nothing like the sign of the cross!"

The two were silent for a few minutes. At length one of them, gazing along the balcony, said, in a whisper, "Look! Here comes our prisoner, the lady of Catanzaro. I marvel if she knows of the spirit."

"Most likely not," replied the soldier, Giacomo; "else she would not dare to roam about as she does at nightfall along that terrace and the bridge to the pavilion. These gentles seldom know anything; or else they pretend not to believe anything of the ghosts and spirits which all their fol-

lowers swear to. Why, thou knowest, as well as I, that there is scarcely a castle in the country that is not haunted."

"Only when some horrid murder, or some other devilry, has been committed in them," replied the other.

"And how many, I should like to know, be there that have not been so accursed?" expostulated Giacomo. "But, hist!" he continued, "the lady comes this way. Let us not seem to watch her. I will go and lie down till my time comes to mount guard."

"And remember to make the sign of the cross if the spirit comes upon thee."

"That I will," replied the second soldier; and they both withdrew into the interior of the palace.

Slowly sauntering, like one in listless idleness, the Countess Clemence advanced along the balcony that stretched barely above the level surface of the lake. At times, she paused and leaned over the

carved rail, with an appearance of languor well suited to a prisoner in hopeless captivity; for several days had now passed away since she had been lured from her home, and as yet no message had arrived from the queen, nor had a doubt been left in her mind that she was imprisoned, perhaps for years, on some unknown charge. Anon, she moved on again; and carelessly turned her steps upon the light bridge that spanned the water between the castle and the little pavilion that arose in the centre of the lake. Notwithstanding the apparent languor of her steps, her eyes gazed anxiously around; and her ears were open to the slightest sound that floated upon the night wind. She knew not what spies might be watching her every moment; and, bent upon discovering some means of escape, she put on the bearing of a captive whom hope had given up to a sense of wearying monotony.

She entered the pavilion in the lake. It

was formed by a miniature cupola crowning a small square room, in each side of which was a large window down to the marble pavement. A slim pillar of the whitest marble divided each of the windows into two compartments: but the interior of the little pleasure-house was darker than the air without, so that the bright gilding of the mosaics in the dome no longer reflected the tints of the departed sun. From the window furthest from the palace, were steps by which the ladies of the harem had been wont to descend into the fairy barges that were wafted upon the crystal lake around. These had all disappeared. The new conquerors of the country had had little leisure for the luxurious pastimes of their predecessors; and not the smallest galley now floated upon the artificial lake, though it still bore the proud name of *Al Bahira*.

How soothing was the quiet scenery around; and how beautiful the transparent

skies above, where the stars came out slowly, one by one! Not a sound was heard, save the distant bark of some faithful watch-dog, or the bells of some church or convent tower that pealed out the hour, and called their inmates, or the pious neighbourhood, to remember the object for which they lived. Not a wild animal was seen to move in the shadowy glades of the chase beyond the lake. Not a water-fowl skimmed across it and ruffled its glassy surface with its noiseless pinion. Like a mirror, it lay beside her. She seated herself on one of the marble benches within the pavilion, and gave herself up to sad thoughts. Gradually the night closed around her. Gradually the stars in the firmament above looked up at her from the glassy surface in which they were reflected, in brilliancy almost as great as they wore in their blue home overhead. She forgot where she was, amid the thoughts of days long passed away,—in thoughts of Taverna's long-evident, but unavowed de-

votion ; in thoughts of his recent fickleness, and of his last visit to Beni-zekher. Minutes, nay almost hours, glided away.

She had risen to return to her prison-chamber, when her eye was arrested by a large bough of myrtle, which she had not before observed, on the surface of the water. She wondered how it could have been broken off, as no storm had recently shaken the bowers of the chase, and no wind had blown to waft it from the shore. Trifles become interesting in the monotony of a prison. When she had idly gazed for a few seconds at the object of her speculation, she became still more surprised to see it wafted nearer and nearer to the pavilion ; and yet no breath of air stirred upon the water. What power moved it forward ? She watched with awakened and real curiosity ; and this was not diminished as she perceived that it still approached nearer and nearer in a straight line ; and that, instead of gliding forward in one unbroken

motion, as it would have done had it been moved by the wind or a current in the water, its course was, every now and then, stayed for a few moments; after which it would advance with a sudden jerk, as if impelled by some re-awakened power.

It is needless to say that the observation of these circumstances caused the Countess Clemence to recall all that energy, and those quick perceptions, which her heart and fancy had, for the last two hours, allowed to wander through many a fairy region of vanished and future hopes. She reseated herself on the marble bench, and gazed more intently still, as the myrtle bough slid near and nearer to the pavilion. At length, as it approached more closely and her observation became more intent, she clearly perceived a human head amid the evergreen leaves; and that a slight ripple extended beyond the bough, which could only be made by hands moving beneath the water. She was convinced that some man was there,

who had adopted this means of approaching unobserved to the Favara—perhaps of gaining admittance within its walls. What ought she to do? Should she give the alarm, or retire quietly to her own rooms; or should she remain and meet the invader of her narrow domain? But a few moments determined her. She considered that whoever approached so furtively, must come against the will of her keepers; probably, therefore, he came to befriend herself. She resolved to wait and meet him, whoever he might be.

She had scarcely come to this determination, when a whisper came from amid the myrtle boughs.

“Honoured lady,” said the voice, “fear not; I come to aid you.”

The Countess made no reply; and the pavilion being now placed between the palace of Favara and the swimmer, the latter struck out more boldly, and soon bore his myrtle branch to the steps of the pavilion,

at the feet of our heroine. In a few moments more, a man rose from the water; and she recognized, with a delight that sprang from many feelings, the slim figure of Richard MacMardagh, in his tight-fitting dress of black serge.

CHAPTER XIII.

——“ his bold head
'Bove the contentious waves he kept, and oar'd
Himself with his good arms in lusty stroke
To the shore, that o'er his wave-worn basis bow'd
As stooping to relieve him. I not doubt
He came alive to land.” *Tempest.*

“THANKS to St. Martin of Tours!” joyfully whispered the Countess Clemence on recognizing, through the darkness, the features of Richard MacMardagh, as, panting for breath, he clung to the steps that descended from the pavilion into the water, and seated himself upon one just above the surface of the lake: “Thanks to St. Martin of Tours!” she said with the first thoughtless feeling of delight; and then as quickly added, in a more anxious tone, “Who sent thee here, good Riccardo?”

“No one, lady,” replied the squire. “I pledged the faith of an Irishman that I would assist you. I am here to redeem my pledge.”

“Alas ! good youth,” answered the countess, with a feeling of disappointment the cause of which we need not pause to investigate, “I fear me, that, alone, thou canst do little against these prison walls and the jailors of Majone.”

“Not if you despond, noble lady : not if that proud spirit which, forgive me for saying so, I believed to live within you, be broken by your imprisonment. But we are not alone, lady. I bear within me a willing heart that never yet failed its owner ; and in the cause that now animates me, I reckon surely on the help of good St. Patrick and of all the holy saints of my own country. Will not yours, also, come to the rescue ?”

“Thou art, indeed, a gallant youth !” replied the Lady Clemence : and making an

effort to overcome the tone of disappointment in which she had first spoken, and which he had evidently noted, she repeated, "Thou art a gallant youth: and full soon, I foretell, wilt thou win thy spurs. Nor shalt thou be held back by any want of spirit in Clemence of Catanzaro. Thou hast judged of me rightly. The soul I bear within me is ready for any high enterprise. If courage and truth can break through this prison, I feel that, with thee to help me, I shall not linger here long."

"Thanks, noble countess," replied the squire reverently kissing the gloved hand she held towards him. Both were silent for a few moments: for the lady felt some awkwardness in enquiring into the plans of the squire without asking whether they were sanctioned or instigated by his patron: and engrossed with thoughts of the Baron of Taverna, she saw not how she could discuss schemes of escape without mentioning his name. This, however, was

a passing weakness. She soon rallied her natural high and light spirit, and gaily inquired—

“ Well, my brave champion, how is it to be ?”

“ I know not, as yet, noble lady,” replied the Irishman. “ I am here to offer you my life, were it needed : and to concert with you a plan for your deliverance. My lord is still in Italy. I have sent word to him how the High Admiral has betrayed you and him and others. Were he here, I doubt not he would gather his followers and overpower the garrison : but if I could release you before he comes, I should be very proud——”

And in the bright moonlight, she saw tears almost start to his eyes as the youth looked up to her with a fine open expression of self-reliance and devotion.

“ Indeed, good Riccardo, I should much prefer to recover my freedom without violence or bloodshed :—to show that a woman

and a squire can outwit the cunning Admiral. How, then, is it to be?"

"I have quartered my horse and those of three troopers—and one of them is a right noble destrier, fit to save a princess—at a house near the little church of San Giovanni: and could you but get across the water, you could easily outspeed all pursuit," suggested the youth.

"If I were but a bird or a fish for five minutes!" ejaculated the countess gaily; but still in a voice little raised above a whisper.

"I have looked all round on the side of the Chase," continued MacMardagh, "in the hope that a boat might lie hid under the boughs: but not a plank is there."

"What a pity that I never learned to swim!" said the lady half-seriously. "I can mount a charger and even wield a lance almost as well as my kinswoman Dame Eremburga herself. I wish I had ever been taught to swim!"

“Would to heaven you had!” sighed the squire. “But say, lady,” he continued, while even the whisper in which he spoke showed that his voice was grown somewhat tremulous—“say, lady; have you seen the vision that walks the terraces of the Favara?”

“What vision?” asked the countess.

“You saw how I crossed the lake e’en now under the shelter of the bough. I had swam to this pavilion the night before last also: and had just landed on these steps, when an awful apparition, in strange unknown armour, glided along the bridge from the palace. It drew near the pavilion. As you may well suppose, I was too fearful to meet it: and so I dived down close beside the stone work, and scarcely kept my mouth above the water. Of course, I could not see anything: but I heard the rattle of a chain as the figure glided into the pavilion; and many a sigh, that betokened a spirit ill at ease, broke from it just above

my head. I have learned this morning, from the people about, that it is the ghost of a Saracen chief, and that it ever haunts the galleries of the palace: and that the soldiers are fearful of mounting guard lest it come across their watch. I wish to heaven, God would damn the infidel dog at once! However, luckily the convent bell told that it was midnight: and the sound of the chains retreating announced that it was leaving the bridge. I said a few prayers, and then swam back as fast as I could to the other side."

"Thou art a brave youth to have come again after such a fright!" said the countess enthusiastically.

"I own I was afraid to venture again last night," said the Irishman. "But I had sworn to help you; and my conscience was ill at ease under my cowardice. I only wish the accursed ghost would show itself now! But they never appear to two people at once."

“ It will certainly not show itself while I am with thee,” exclaimed the Countess laughing exceedingly. MacMardagh murmured something which shewed that he disliked her merriment; and this only made her laugh the more. At length, she checked herself, for she had been almost choked by the necessity of keeping her mirth within such compass that it could not reach the ears of the sentinels on the terrace.

“ Listen, good Riccardo,” she said at length; “ and excuse me that I laugh at the success of my plot. I am the ghost !”

“ You !”

“ I myself. I remembered some legend that the Favara was haunted by the spirit of a Saracen—as, in fact, almost every castle in Sicily is said to be: and I determined to raise the ghost myself in the hope that I might disappear some night with it.”

“ Oh, what a brave idea !” cried the squire joyfully.

“It has answered thus far, at all events,” continued the lady: “although if thou hadst been less true, I might have lost thy services. All the soldiers on guard believe in me. But it is now getting late: and to avoid suspicion I must return. Meet me here to-morrow night at the same hour: and think, in the meanwhile, what thou canst devise. I myself will send the lady Catherine to the queen to ask her to supply me with a barge that I may spend some weary hours in fishing on the lake. Her guards will go with me, even if it is granted: that I know: but perchance the boat may be left within thy reach at night: and, if so, it may be useful. Farewell brave Mardano: the saints protect thee.”

She moved briskly back to the palace; and delighted her more timid companion by telling her that she had met with a champion through whose aid she had good hope of recovering the liberty of them both.

CHAPTER XIV.

—— “let me have
A dram of poison ; such soon-speeding geer
As will disperse itself through all the veins,
That the life-weary taker may fall dead.
And that the trunk may be discharged of breath,
As violently as hasty powder fir'd
Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb.”

Romeo and Juliet.

THAT same evening the Baron of Taverna had returned to Palermo. He had deferred his arrival till nightfall, that the lateness of the hour might excuse his not making any report to the King and Majone of the results of his expedition to Bari, until he should have had an opportunity of consulting his kinsman, the archbishop, on their present mutual position. Gladly would he have taken some immediate active step towards the liberation of the countess ; but

prudence bade him to do nothing rashly, and first to learn full particulars of her capture from his squire, MacMardagh, and concert with him a mode for her deliverance. Richard MacMardagh, however, was not to be found. He was vainly inquired for in his lord's residence in Palermo. He had disappeared, a few days before, with three of the best mounted troopers, and had not since been heard of.

We think that we have already stated that the old cathedral and archiepiscopal residence were situated beyond the western horn of the Kalah, or port of Palermo, and, consequently, beyond the tongue of land on which stood the more strongly fortified heart of the city. Beyond the old gate of Santa Agata, our hero slowly rode in the dusk of the evening, and skirted the little river Papireto and the beautiful bay, formed by its junction with the sea, until the broad mass of the cathedral loomed before him in the twilight. The palace of the primate

adjoined it; and much did the Baron of Taverna marvel at the military aspect that now surrounded its peaceful cloisters. Men-at-arms kept guard before the principal entrance; mounted troopers came and went in haste; and the whole residence bore more of the characteristics proper to the castle of a feudal chieftain than to the house of a peaceful prelate. Two or three of the most powerful barons of the island, followed by strong escorts of armed retainers, left the palace, in different companies, ere Taverna had gained the inner apartments and spoken to the trusted chamberlain of his kinsman.

“What mean all this warlike show and funeral solemnity, good Roberto?” he anxiously inquired. “How fares his reverence?”

“Ill, my lord,” replied the faithful follower; “confined to his bed, and that by foul practices. But he has inquired impatiently for your signoria; and I must pray

you to allow me to conduct you to him without delay."

They passed on through several apartments, where anxious retainers—soldiers and clergy—were mingled together in whispering groups. Beyond, in a small room overlooking the gardens and the bay, the Archbishop Hugo lay on a wide pillowed couch. A lamp, fed by aromatic oil, scented and partially lighted the apartment: but the broad rays of the moon eclipsed its feebler light, and, falling upon the venerable head of the prelate, showed his features worn and distorted in a manner that shocked Taverna as much as it surprised him.

"I thank God, thou art come at last, Matteo," exclaimed the sick man, with feverish eagerness. "I trust thou hast not induced the nobles of Italy to succumb to the traitor?"

"I rejoice that your reverence has seen through his wiles," replied the baron, de-

voutly kissing the hand of the prelate ;
“ though I fear me he has already wrought
disloyally upon you.”

“ Disloyally ! no boy : he has acted according to his nature ; and as there was no loyalty in it, he could not belie it. I was a fool to believe and trust him : and he has poisoned me for my pains.”

“ I well believe that he may have wished to do so ; but I trust that he has not succeeded in his base attempt,” observed Taverna, soothingly.

“ I know not ; I know not ;” insisted the archbishop. “ He poured poison into my goblet ; that the Arabian mediciner has proved. Whether his skill will avail to raise me up from this couch of pain, rests with God to determine. Dost know how it came to pass ? No. Listen then ; and be prepared to act the part of a man. Thou hast been too easily led heretofore ; thou must now learn to lead others. He was urging forward the conspiracy thou know-

est of, when I was moved, by the old suspicions, to doubt the honesty of his intentions towards the boy, Ruggiero. I questioned him. He almost avowed that his plan was to obtain possession of the child that he might exercise the sovereign power himself. I knew that neither Normans, Saracens, nor Italians, would submit to this; and I protested against it. He saw he could not bend my resolve; invited himself to sup with me, and poisoned me. It seems the dose was not strong enough, or the leech was too well skilled, for I am still alive. How long I may be permitted to continue so, is now the question."

"Deem you, then, he would again attempt your life?"

"Aye, that do I, cousin: deemest thou that a serpent will ever grow into a dove? He has made other attempts: but I am now too well guarded. His creatures are not admitted: and the pretended healing possets he sends me are thrown to the dogs—

who die of them. But it cannot stop here. He is working against me with the king. Ill as I am, William has not scrupled to send to claim some pretended debts of old standing—first-fruits of the see, or sacrilegious claims never made before. This shows the mind of the king. What can I do? No attempt to justify myself would be of avail. By secret means or by open calumny, Majone will have my life. I hate bloodshed;— I loathe murder: but he is above all human law; and self-defence is the law and the right of nature. Either Majone or I must die.”

“Your hand on it, monsignore,” exclaimed the Baron of Taverna. “I, too, have discovered his treacheries; and have pledged myself, to the lords of Italy, to remove the usurper. With your sanction, I go into the work joyfully.”

“Joyfully no,” said the prelate. “It is a sad necessity. But the king will not receive my explanations: and neither the

justice of heaven nor of man demands that I should lie here and await till the poisoner find means to accomplish his purpose upon me. I must defend myself by the weapons he has himself selected, since no others are left to me. Arouse then our friends. I have seen many. I am convinced that we were deluded: that the villain does aim at the dethronement of his sovereign in order that he may usurp his crown. Sure proof has been brought to me. If Majone cannot be displaced without removing the king to make way for the boy in the manner we had planned, it must be done: but, perhaps, the plan of the Italian barons had better be tried first. Gather all against Majone. His death or exile must be secured."

"Doubt me not, monsignore. None will more willingly arm against him," said the baron rising.

"Aye: but it must be done quickly, I tell thee," insisted the sick man. "Else while thou art arming thy followers, I may

be put out of the way. Collect thy people, an thou wilt: but keep thine own sword loose in its scabbard. My life may depend upon the ready hand of a single friend. In such a case, will thine fail me?"

"Never, never, my lord!" exclaimed Taverna with fervour.

"May God bless thee, my son!" sighed the archbishop: "and may He not lay to our charge what we are compelled to do. Heaven knows that I am moved by no feeling of anger or personal revenge; and that if law and justice could protect innocence, deeds of violence would be far from my thoughts. But while the world is what it is, we must meet it with its own tools. Now leave me, Taverna. See all the friends thou canst. Get them to arm and to join thee: but, above all, be on the alert: and take heed to thine own self if thou hast any cause to dread his anger. He will not spare thee if he distrusts thee."

A violent spasm of pain here came on ; and with many words of sympathy and of caution to the chamberlain, the Baron of Taverna left the sufferer in the hands of his attendants.

CHAPTER XV.

“ They followed from the snowy bank
The footsteps one by one
Into the middle of the plank,
And further there was none.”

Wordsworth.

THE following day was spent by our hero in removing himself and his followers from Palermo to his castle of Cacabo, in the neighbourhood of the city; in collecting around him all the vassals he could assemble at the shortest notice; and in arming and fortifying that important stronghold. Couriers were sent by him to all the other barons whom he deemed he could arouse against the High Admiral: and every precaution was taken to defend himself and his partisans from the wiles of the treacherous minister. Nor, amid all these

cares, was the state of the Countess of Catanzaro forgotten. Richard MacMardagh was, indeed, sought after in vain : but every inquiry was made into the present position of the lady and the state of the Favara palace and of its garrison ; and plans were laid for her deliverance on the following morning by force of arms. Matteo of Taverna appeared to have, indeed, assumed a new character ; and in casting aside the wavering temper which had been engendered by the false position in which he had placed himself in a moment of ambition and weakness, to have suddenly put on a sternness of determination which was, perhaps, equally foreign to his nature.

It may well be supposed that the arrival of the royal envoy in Palermo, and his subsequent retreat to his castle without having reported to the king the result of his mission, could not be overlooked by so jealous a minister as was Giorgio Majone. He

had been early informed of all his movements:—of his nocturnal visit to the archbishop, and of the forces he was collecting at Cacabo. Such conduct told the history of his mission; told that he had leagued with those whom he was sent to appease, and with the late fellow-conspirator on whom poison had failed to do its work. When, therefore, the minister saw the Lady Catherine, the companion of the Countess Clemence, enter the apartment in which he sat with Queen Margaret, and crave for favours and a less restricted prison for her noble mistress, all the bitter feelings which had risen up within him against his rebellious son-in-law, all his own and Corazza's jealousy of the Countess, rushed to his remembrance, and urged him to gratify the first movement of spite and disappointment.

“The lady would have a barge to take her pleasure in on the Bahira, would she!” he tauntingly cried when the young girl

had timidly given her message. "I doubt not she would! Such a barge might enable her to take her pleasure beyond the Bahira, likewise: her fancies must not be entrusted to her own wild keeping. I gather from what you say, mistress, that she has already more freedom than befits one who, either by herself or her friends, is rising in arms against her sovereign. Your grace," he continued, turning to the queen, "knows to whom I allude: and methinks it would be as well to prevent this young messenger from going back and reporting to her friend what she will doubtless hear spoken of by many."

"Sooth to say, the Favara is a dull place for one so young," observed the queen. "Thou shalt stay with me, child, instead of returning to it."

"Oh, noble lady, let me return to my sweet friend!" implored the young girl, passionately. "The old place is, indeed, dull; but how much worse it will be to her without me!"

“I trust that in a few days she, also, may be able to leave it,” continued Queen Margaret. “Meanwhile thou shalt remain and attend upon me.”

A female in waiting was called, and the weeping messenger was given over into her charge. The queen and Majone continued their conference.

Meanwhile, dull and anxious were the hours spent by the Countess Clemence in anticipation of the return of her messenger. At first, she had been all hope that her prayer would be granted for instant admittance to the queen, in order that she might meet whatever charge was against her. Then had succeeded an hour or two of despondency. Then again she imagined that the lesser favour of the pleasure-boat could not be denied her; and many a plan was formed in which the boat was to be the means of freeing her from wearisome thralldom. The day passed away—still Cattarina returned not; and no messenger summoned

her to the Alcazar, as she had fondly anticipated at first. She grew excited and feverish. She cast down the framework in which she was embroidering a sash in the richest silks of Constantinople, and hurried out to pace the bridge, and to see whether aught could be observed stirring from the pavilion in the lake. She stepped upon the terrace which, as we have explained, ran along the whole length of the front of the Favara, just above the water. A sentinel advanced towards her from each end, and intimated to her, civilly but firmly, that she was not to pass to the bridge.

Our heroine was too high-minded to expostulate with servants who, she well knew, but obeyed the orders of their superiors. She returned to her apartments and resumed her embroidery. More regularly and carefully than ever she plied her needle. Her whole soul seemed to be engrossed in the work before her. It was, in truth, but a vent to her anxiety,—a means she adopted

to keep herself bodily quiet, while she thought over this new change in the conduct of her enemies. Long and bitterly she thought; and he who could have looked into the soul of that gentle-minded woman, would have seen stern resolve and contempt of danger gradually rise up and possess its every faculty. She was not one to be cast down by difficulties; and she doubted not that, if she was true to herself, some means would be found for her deliverance.

She prayed long and fervently. The lightest hearts are ever the most pious; and her lively and hopeful disposition originated as much in the feeling of God within her, as in natural light-heartedness and a happy temperament.

The eunuch who usually waited upon her, brought in her afternoon meal. She had gained the goodwill of the poor slave by her kindness and condescension; and he looked sad when he saw her seat herself at the table. She observed that he did

so, and a sudden thought came over her :—

“ Is this food safe ?” she asked. “ Thou wilt not deceive me, Hassan ; may I eat in safely ?”

“ Oh, si—si—noble lady,” responded the African cheerfully, “ The viands have not been practised upon. I only looked sad to think that you can have little appetite after losing the Signorina Cattarina, and being forbidden to take any exercise.”

“ Wherefore is this change made, good Hassan ?” she asked.

“ I know not, Signora Contessa. But the guards are doubled in the Favara. There is some talk of a rising amongst the barons.”

“ I drink to their success, Hassan,” she said, taking a small goblet of wine. “ Thou seest that I mean to bear my imprisonment with a light heart.”

“ Do so, noble lady. It is good that you should keep up your strength for whatever may chance.”

The meal was soon over. The attendant withdrew. The sun fell lower on the horizon. The hours of evening came on. But few would pass away ere that appointed for her meeting with Richard MacMardagh would come round. And even then, would she be permitted to cross the bridge to the pavilion at which he would expect her? Would the new guards be more watchful over the face of the waters, and discover the approach of her sole humble champion? Perhaps their vigilance might abate at night, and both she and the squire be able to elude it. This was her only hope. She would not tempt them by offering unnecessarily to exceed the limits assigned to her. She would stay within her apartments; and, perhaps, they would think her resigned.

Hour after hour passed on. The sun was set. The short-lived twilight had also disappeared. She rose gently and peered through the lattice. The eternal guards were there.

Like a guilty thing, she drew back, and again hurried to her couch. How her heart beat! Audibly. After a while, she rose and dismissed her only female attendant for the night. She removed the lamp into a darkened closet, that those hateful sentinels might think it extinguished, and that she was retired to her rest,—for there were no shutters in those days to prevent the glimmer of the flame from within. But in the bright moonbeams, her rooms were were still sufficiently light for her to find her way about them. Again she noiselessly stepped, on tiptoe, to the window. There still paced the weary sentries;—nay, they had been changed; for she now recognized one of those whom she had before often marked. He was at the further end of the terrace. A change of guard betokened a vigilant watch through the night. She had not a chance of passing unnoticed to the pavilion! And yet, if she missed this appointment, how could she, unaided, escape

from her persecutors? With a feeling akin to despair, she drew back from the casement and threw herself on her couch. Two more weary hours passed on. All was silence around, save the measured tread of the sentry. Midnight was near at hand.

The soldier Giacomo, whose account of the vision he had seen on a former evening we have before listened to, had begun his midnight watch. He strove to think that he had now no fear of the apparition, for it had not been seen on the night before. Besides, the sentries were now doubled: and he secretly felt that he should derive a great accession of valour from the guard at the other end of the terrace. Valiantly, therefore, he went to his post, and cheerily he gazed at the moon and at the stars above. Objects underneath them were less distinctly marked, and it was some while ere he ventured to examine them. But he soon began to whistle, scarce audibly, an old Northman lay, to prove his valour to

himself as he peered into the lights and shadows that lay upon the lake and the surrounding scenery. All was still. Not a breath was stirring. And no single object met his trembling gaze that he was not able to define, recognize, or account for after three or four more and more prolonged glances. He shouldered his arms and began to swagger, up and down the terrace, with a devil-me-care bearing. Suddenly, the sound of a bell reverberated on the darkened air. He started. It was repeated: and he recognized the midnight call to prayer from the neighbouring monastery. He smiled contemptuously as he thought how a coward would have been frightened by it; and he, a brave man, resumed his measured tread.

Suddenly, he heard an unearthly sound as of the rattle of chains. It must be—it was the same! He only half-turned his head over his shoulder (for he was pacing, at the time, in the opposite direction) and

there, sure enough, was the image of the Saracen emir:—his unearthly solemnity of gait—his round concave buckler—his awful turban—his terrific spear. One glance was sufficient. With little of military precision, he continued his walk away from the advancing ghost. Quicker and quicker he strided to the furthest end of the balcony: and there leaned against the rail, while he muttered prayer after prayer, and cut the air into shivers by the frequent signs of the cross he made upon his breast.

The bridge to the pavilion was midway between the two ends of the balcony: and the rattle of the chains seemed to die away along it. The soldier Giacomo wished for no better exit to the ghost: and manfully repeated his prayers as he leant upon the balustrade and gazed, with startling eyeballs, on the marble pavement beneath his feet. The sounds died away. In a quarter of an hour, he again raised his head and looked timidly around him. He neither

saw nor heard anything to disturb the awful stillness of the hour and place. He resumed his walk ; but, as may be well presumed, he turned back ere he reached the bridge branching off to the pavilion.

On the steps of that pavilion, half-immersed in the water, Richard MacMardagh had ensconced himself before the convent bell had tolled. He had soon recovered his wind and had laid the myrtle bough on the water beside him. He, too, had heard the startling call to prayer : he, too, heard the jangle of the chain as it slowly advanced along the bridge nearer and nearer to the pavilion. A peevish muttered oath against unseasonable mummary died upon his lips, and the vision of the slaughtered Saracen stood beside him.

“ Riccardo,” gently whispered a voice.

“ I am here, lady,” he answered. “ But wherefore this disguise to-night ?”

“ To keep faith with thee and to escape. Knowest thou not the guards are

doubled and that my prison-bounds are narrowed ?”

“ I knew that some fresh men-at-arms had been sent into the Favara, and I feared for you the more, lady.”

“ Listen, brave Riccardo,” said the Lady Clemence. “ For some reason the guards are doubled, and vigilant. I know not what time we may have to speak. I had need to come thus or not at all. Now say, frankly :—hast thou devised any plan for my deliverance ?”

“ Alas ! I have been able to perfect nothing more. I hoped to hear that you had obtained the fishing-boat.”

“ There is no hope of it. Cattarina, too, is detained from me : so that I have only myself to encumber thee withal. Are thy horses in readiness ?”

“ At a moment’s notice. Would that your signoria were on the other side, to try their speed !”

“ It depends on thee to place me there,”

said the countess. "Darest thou entrust thy life to my courage?"

"I dare any thing to save you, lady."

"Answer not rashly. Hast thou, I ask thee solemnly, hast thou that opinion of my courage and, presence of mind that thou wilt stake thy life upon it?"

"So help me God and St. Patrick, I am yours!" answered the youth fervently.

"If I misdoubted myself, believe me that I would not expose thee to the danger," continued Clemence. "I must escape from the Favara as thou hast come to it."

"You cannot swim, lady!" expostulated MacMardagh.

"Nor sink, with thee and a brave heart to bear me up. Listen. I was educated with brothers. I have lived near the sea. Thou knowest how the people of this country pride themselves on their swimming. I have heard enough of it, to know that every one can swim who does not fear to sink. I tell thee, forestiere, that I fear nothing

in the attempt to escape from this place. Not only do I consider my life in danger here, but my pride rebels at the manner in which I allowed myself to be entrapped."

"Still, noble lady—"

"Hist. Let me tell thee my plan. Thou shalt then aid me or not as thou wilt. I know enough of the art of swimming to know that a swimmer can buoy up and guide through the water any person who will hold a stake and float passively in his wake. The only danger is that the unskilled follower may become frightened and cling to the swimmer so as to hinder him from using his limbs. I believe myself to have resolution enough to lie passive in the deep water. If thou wilt trust me, the only pledge I ask of thee is to let go the stick by which I shall hold on, if thou seest that I am growing fearful and am likely to catch hold of thee in my terror. Promise me that, if I offer to do so, thou wilt leave me to sink."

“Let us start, noble countess: let us start at once!” cried the Irishman delighted. “The holy Virgin inspires the scheme. Let me seek for a pole for you to cling to.”

“The half of this lance will suffice,” said the lady. “Break it across thy knee; under the water, to deaden the sound. See; now I will tie this kerchief over this hollow Saracen buckler. I will hold it in my left hand, and it will help to buoy me up. Lie there, thou infidel badge,” she said, taking off the turban. “Though thou hast served me a good turn thus far, I preferred to swim and ride in a close iron scull-cap that I also found in the heap of old armour in the tower. Now, Irishman, in the name of the blessed Mother of God, let us start. I shall not speak again till we are on the other side. Lead me whither thou wilt, and I will follow trusting in thee: if need be, let go thy hold of the lance, and I will sink silently to the bottom, trusting in God.”

She went down the steps of the pavilion

and, without hesitation, entered the water. She stood on the lowest step, and a sign answered the squire's look of inquiry to see if she were ready. Both made the holy sign of the cross devoutly on their breasts : and then the Irishman struck boldly out into the deep water. He was obliged to leave his myrtle bough ; the hand that had before upheld it being now engaged with the broken lance to which clung his precious charge. With the other arm, he laboured manfully along. Few were better swimmers than Richard MacMardagh ; and good need he had to put forth all his energy. But the countess behaved nobly. From the time when he wafted her from the steps of the pavilion into the deep water, she moved not a limb nor drew a breath through her mouth. Scarcely her lip quivered in prayer.

MacMardagh was obliged to keep the pavilion, as long as possible, between himself and the sentinels on the palace. When he could no longer avail himself of the

shelter it interposed, he turned himself on his shoulders and rested for a few seconds. Fearful, however, that the strength of his charge might give way, he soon again struck out and steered, in the most direct line, to the little grassy beach where he purposed to land. The moon shone bright overhead and, fortunately for the fugitives, gleamed upon many a white cygnet and strange waterfowl that scudded from them as they disturbed its lazy career. Had a guard from the Favara perceived them, he could not have distinguished their heads from the floating water-birds and the masses of gorgeous lily around.

And now they neared the bank: and still the countess kept her hold. An old family legend had first inspired her with the thought of attempting to escape by this means. She had severely questioned herself of her resolution and strength of mind before she resolved to adopt it; and she now thanked heaven that she had not overestimated her courage. As Richard Mac-

Mardagh rose upon the beach, she rested her knees upon the gravel; and, still in the water, fervently returned thanks to the Almighty power who had preserved her through so strange an adventure.

The Irishman led her some little distance beside the walls that skirted the chase: and then left her amid myrtle and arbutus bushes while he went to fetch his horses. In half an hour, he returned on horseback, followed by two mounted troopers who led a fourth horse saddled and caparisoned.

“My men were all ready. They are faithful and vigilant. Whither, lady, will you ride?” he asked, as he assisted her into the saddle.

“To my uncle’s castle—to Mistretto, brave youth,” answered the countess.

They all put spurs to their horses and were soon out of sight. Before the break of day, the bugle at the bars of the castle of Mistretto reechoed the cheering summons of the Countess of Catanzaro.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ Sleeping within mine orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of mine ears did pour
The leperous distilment.” *Hamlet.*

LATE on the same evening on which the Countess Clemence thus effected her escape from that imprisonment which had had the effect of drawing away the Baron of Taverna from the party of the High Admiral and firmly binding him to the leaguers, Majone took his way towards the archiepiscopal residence. It was true that he had attempted to poison the primate; but he had done so under the guise of friendship; and nothing had openly occurred between them to occasion a cessation of the usual

courtesies of life. He had, therefore, no reason to abstain from visiting his sick friend, and many motives urged him to do so;—the principal one of which was—that the said friend did not die fast enough.

The character of the High Admiral was so strangely composed of frankness, deceit, and villany, that we never approach it without fearing lest the reader should reproach us with outraging humanity by sketching impossible features. We can only say that the events we are about to relate actually occurred A.D. 1160.

The same or similar groups of anxious retainers and friends surrounded the dwelling of the archbishop, or thronged its walls, as had greeted the Baron of Taverna on the preceding evening. All inwardly cursed the great minister as he made his way through them; but all retired with more or less anxiety to escape either from his observation, or from closer contact with him. His greeting of the chamberlain,

Roberto, was so frank and cordial that that functionary wanted presence of mind to debar him from the chamber of his lord; and the admiral closely followed him thither without permitting himself to be announced.

“Caro Hugo!” he exclaimed to the sick prelate; “forgive the familiarity of my address, dear monsignore, but it touches me to the heart to see you in this plight.”

The archbishop turned away his head in disgust.

“Rejoiced I am to see so many friends and followers in attendance around you,” continued Majone. “This is not such a wicked world, after all! The sympathy your friends show for you proves that a good man is prized—even in this life.”

“Do not leave the room, Roberto!” cried the archbishop to his chamberlain.

“No, do not leave us, good Roberto!” said the admiral. “I have brought here a medicine prepared by the most skilful mediciner of Italy; and you shall administer

it to his reverence. Sure I am that it will soon restore him to his wonted health."

"I am deeply beholden to your lordship, but I had rather decline it," said the sick man, in a tone and with a look of concentrated and bitter irony.

"You are too fond of the infidel Saracens, monsignore; I shall really suspect that you are only half a Christian," persisted Majone, jestingly. "I never trust those Saracen leeches myself. One cannot be certain that they have a conscience."

"Roberto!" cried the archbishop, "come hither. Here, to this side of the couch. Stoop down. It is poison," he whispered. "I know it is poison, and he will force me to swallow it. Send and summon Taverna, or some other kinsman; tell them, for the love of heaven, to come and save me."

The chamberlain left the couch hastily.

"Send in the Bishop of Syracuse before you go," cried the sick man. "Did you not say he was in waiting? Send him in. Instantly! instantly!"

“ You had really better take this medicament first,” persisted Majone; “ it will give you strength to enjoy the converse of your friends.”

The chamberlain, however, without quitting the room, had, through the half-opened door, made a sign to those in the adjoining apartment; and the Bishop of Syracuse here entered and took a seat beside the pillow of the invalid.

“ I am endeavouring to persuade our worthy friend,” said the High Admiral, addressing him, “ to take a potion which I have had mixed with the greatest care. I saw the leech myself pour it into this flask,” and he produced one of gold from the folds of his ample cloak.

“ Is not his lordship too kind ?” said the archbishop to his friend, in the sarcastic humour that comes over some men when ill.

“ Indeed, I fear me that the stomach of his reverence is too weak to permit him to take anything at this hour,” observed the Bishop of Syracuse.

“Set it down on the table, good admiral,” said the archbishop, emboldened by the vicinity of the other prelate, and feeling that no violence would be attempted in his presence. “Set it down on the table, and I will swallow it to-morrow. Will not that be soon enough?”

“As you will ; as you will,” ejaculated Majone, with seeming carelessness. “I will carry back the precious medicine with me ; but you are ill-advised, per Bacco ! Let us talk of other matters. The king presses you hard for some pretended debt, as I have heard.”

“I thought your lordship had heard of it!” sarcastically remarked the sick man.

“Why, caro archivescovo, ye know that Giorgio Majone hears of everything that the king does ; and that his enemies charge him with instigating every harshness.”

“Poor injured man!” sighed the archbishop.

“Indeed it is time that our scheme

were put into execution," persisted Majone. "What says Matteo of Taverna? You have seen him since his return?"

"He heard of my illness, and, as a kinsman, hastened to inquire after me," replied the primate.

A fit of spasmodic suffering here came on—perhaps the show of it was rather encouraged by the archbishop in order to break off a conversation that might implicate his relative. It effectually prevented the continuation of the dialogue. Majone proposed to the Bishop of Syracuse to administer the boasted potion while the invalid was in this almost senseless state; but to this the other strenuously objected. Foiled and angry, the High Admiral at length withdrew.

The chamberlain, Roberto, meanwhile, had been on the point of sending messengers to the Baron of Taverna, and other friends of his patron, when the young lord rode up to the gate of the archbishop's palace.

“For God’s sake, my lord,” cried the chamberlain, “put an end to this. Majone is with my lord, and trying to make him swallow some fresh poisonous drug. His life is not sure for an hour.”

Taverna half drew his sword from the scabbard. “As well do it now, as later!” he cried, and was pushing forward.

“Not in my lord’s presence,” said the chamberlain; “besides he has his friends and followers in the adjoining room. But what better time could you have than as he returns home? You could strike upon him in the shadows of the street.”

“Dost take me for a dastard murderer!” exclaimed Taverna, angrily.

Another noble Sicilian here rode up to our hero, and his conversation with the servant of the archbishop was broken off. But the new comer was not one likely to tame down the excited feelings of the baron; it was Guglielmo Count of Lesina—a man of a stern and fierce temper, and one of the

most violent enemies of the admiral. The two rode aside together.

Half an hour later, Majone, preceded and followed by a large body of friends and of servants carrying torches, was making his way towards the gate of Santa Agata, on his return to his tower of Baych. With many a laugh and witty jest at the good-nature of the admiral, who had allowed himself to be foiled of the object with which he had visited the archbishop, and which seemed to be pretty accurately surmised, the escort came boisterously onwards. Suddenly, one hastened back and whispered to the minister that the street was lined with groups of men in the colours of the Baron of Taverna and the Count of Lesina. Majone turned pale; but after a few moments' consideration, he said, "It is too late to retreat. We are a strong body, also. Go and greet the Baron of Taverna on my part, and bid him to come to me," he said to the man who had brought the information.

The message was repeated to our hero, who stood beside the gateway with the Count of Lesina.

“We are discovered, friend,” cried the latter. “On him, at once!”

Both set spurs to their chargers, and Taverna soon came in sight of the bulky admiral.

“Here I am, traitor, villain, poisoner!” he cried. “Here I am, thou monster of all wickedness, thou dishonourer of thy king! Draw, and defend thyself!”

He struck at him furiously with his sword; but the admiral had also drawn. He was a good swordsman, and he easily parried the blow. A few more were interchanged. They were well matched; but the youth and skill of the younger man prevailed; and Giorgio Majone fell to the earth—dead; while, strange to say, the whole company of his friends and followers fled from his side without having raised an arm in his defence.

We must request the reader not to admit any feeling of ill-will against our hero for this act of "wild justice." Such were the manners of those centuries to which some look back with such fond regret. Our next chapter will show in what light the deed he had done was considered by the nobles and the people of the kingdom.

END OF VOL. I.

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